Contemporary Hinduism
A Quest for Identity

R.P. Singh



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HINDUISM : ENEMIES WITHIN

THE CONTEXT

The first question I need to answer is why have I written this book? Particularly when I have very little to aspire for and am a non-political, non-religious person in late sixties. Firstly, because, I find the statements made by our political leaders and innumerable intellectuals, journalists and similar other individuals about Hindus and Hinduism void of logic and intended to hurt those who never learnt to answer back and who in their innocence believe that these critics occupy a higher pedestal in wisdom than they do. Emboldened by the contempt, in which these men and women hold Hinduism, we have Muslim Imams and university teachers who have joined in the chorus of vituperations against the 'unbelievers'. I think it is my moral responsibility to at least question the logic in their arguments.

The second reason is the immediate cause of provocation. I live in a DDA colony of 272 flats which to my knowledge does not have a single Muslim owner but thanks to a contractor they came to occupy a dargah of a non-descript saint. This colony being self-financed in nature the residents are busy minting money, flaunting their Cielos, Daeoows and Esteems and in their arrogance cannot have even a meaningful association. The result is that every Friday a Muslim fanatic in the shape of conductor of Namaz (muazzin) exhorted his followers/ listeners until last month to teach the Kafirs in this colony a lesson. The immediate cause for

jehad was that a retired Bank manager went to court against the regular insults this Namazi hurled upon everyone. On Fridays except for the very old and the womenfolk there was no other adult male available to protest against this outrageous behaviour of the gathering. Though there is a police post in the neighbourhood and there is always a casual constable or two to monitor the Muslim gathering against whose behaviour, I am sure, numerous complaints must have been lodged until now and a few residents have even gone to High Court too, nothing in the nature of peace had been restored. And for this to continue while "a rabid communal party" has been in power and the locality is represented in the Lok Sabha by its Brahmin nominee is nothing short of a rebuttal of the allegation that BJP helps Hindus.

I invite all those who have not a single word in favour of the Hindus and are all praise of Muslim culture, their language and contributions to Indian history and life to come and find out for themselves that when this Nation is standing close to the third millennium and has been free for over fifty years now, how the 'unbelievers' are being treated by the 'faithfuls'.

It would be wrong to say that I did not get journalists to come and witness this unusual spectacle of "the great resurgence of Islam" in Free India but they, like many residents in this colony, squeamishly turned their tails more in fear than surprise.

As a student of history I could give countless examples of Islamic occupation of the non-Islamic nations and how most of the non-Muslims had to suffer the humiliation at their hands. One need only read a newspaper to appreciate how a few Christian countries are facing the Muslim terror on their native soils. Only cowards could rationalise the reality.

With the type of leadership and political philosophy we have I do not think I am living in a non-Muslim country or not under Muslim terror. A Hindu Prime Minister protected and shielded as he is by an army of guards cannot give any confidence to this nation.

I know what I am writing will not make the slightest impact on anyone — neither on the residents of this colony nor on the Government, and definitely not on the wise men who advocate 'secularism' to rationalise their own behaviour and vacuous philosophy.

I have no wish to hurt anybody's sensitivities but I would not allow anyone to advance defenses on a questionable premise and insult my intelligence.

The other reason why I have been forced to digress into an area which is not my own is that Hinduism has come to be identified with backwardness, cowardice and downright stupidity. To be a Hindu implies an insult in a modern world. I do not agree with anyone who says or believes so. I also do not agree with anyone who must define Hinduism in the context of Islam. I have

not read the Holy Koran but I am told that Islam means 'peace'. History has taught me that for Muslims, religion and politics are identical— something a 'non-believer' cannot quite appreciate.

I do not deny that there have been numerous Muslims who have fought and died for India, or there are exceptions that tolerate Hindus and even appreciate their way of life. I also do not want to wish that Muslims should live in fear of anyone — least of all of Hindus who have no agenda of dominance and who cannot have one, even if a few suspected that to be possible.

However, this does not mean that I would like the Shahabuddins and the 'Shahi' Imams to continue humiliating the 'non-believers'. I fail to admire top political leaders who call on a Muslim Imam to court his favour and divide Hindu society into unbridgeable caste-lines and yet claim to be 'secular'. I find it highly unpalatable for any university funded by the State to be organising itself on religious bases and continue advancing communally divisive agenda — particularly when its history is replete with activities which would have justified its closure.

I could continue in this vein for some more pages but I refrain to do so for the simple reason lest I may not extend the bounds of logic to step into an area where wilderness begins.

I would only want people to note the reality as it exists. In Kashmir where Hindus have been

systematically decimated, not a single Hindu organisation came forward to help them, yet all Muslim countries have come forward to fight the case of the killers. All over India Muslims are being indoctrinated to form militant organisations through their madrasahs and other similar educational institutions. One is not very sure why Arabic language should be so amenable for naming countless terrorist groups. The Hindus came nearest to forming two organisations to match the innumerable ones Muslims have and could find among their gods only two names for ready adoption — one of Lord Hanuman and the other of Lord Shiva. Bajrangbali or Hanuman is a vegetarian, Ram-worshipping, brave and a scholarly personage who would not kill anyone unless ordered to do so. And, Lord Shiva gets angry very rarely only to be pleased ever so quickly even with the demons. I would not like to compare any of Hindu gods with Muslim personages because I recall M.D. Nalapat who in his secularist enthusiasm had once dared to do so with Lord Ram himself only to invite a reprimand from a Muslim lady for an affront to Islam. Surely enough, Hindus could never rival Muslims either in taking affront or organising themselves for violent activities.

Muslims use most intemperate language about Hindus, are contemptuous of Hindu divines and their places of worship but their extraordinary sensitivity to any one daring to talk about their customs, deities, rituals etc. is invariably violently responded.

The question is therefore are Muslims in India sacred cows or are more than equals? What are they always resentful against? What can Government do for them what they have not snatched away already? What do they expect a 'model' Hindu behaviour to be like?

Even in a film if a Muslim girl is shown to love a Hindu boy it is legitimately a cause for rioting — but numerous Hindu girls in real life are choosing Muslim boys for wedlock with general consent is overlooked. A Jammu Hindu doctor has to convert first before he marries a Muslim girl but no Hindu girl can remain Hindu the day the Islamic marriage is solemnized.

Is it not interesting that Yusuf Khan (Dilip Kumar) once wanted to enlist himself for war in Bosnia at his age and Asghar Ali Engineer who defends Aurangzeb's destruction of Hindu temples in a write-up in **The Times of India** remains highly respected and secular and both get even rewards for their pains. Mr. Engineer in another write-up in **The Times of India** had talked of the activities of Tablig in Haryana, which perhaps escaped public notice.

The context I have in mind comes alive with the President of Pakistan exhorting his countrymen on the occasion of inauguration of a seminar ("Vision of Iqbal and Pakistan 2010"). "Ghauri, Ghaznavi, Babri and Abdali missiles should be developed to make the defense of Pakistan impregnable.... We should rekindle the concept of Islamic Ummah (world). We should

keep in view the collective interests and resources of the Islamic world while making any future planning" (*Times of India*, 20 April 1990).

Contrast this exhortation with an objective analysis K. Subrahmanyam makes of the Indian response under the title: **India's Lotus-Eaters** (Myth of Pakistan's Nuclear Celibacy) and demands that Indians must wake up to reality. "Instead of wishfully fantasying about Pakistan's non-weaponised nuclear celibacy, we must demand from the government of India its assessment of Pakistan's nuclear weapon status and nuclear doctrine". (*Times of India*, 20 April 1990).

The same paper on the date cited above carried yet another write-up which has a bearing on the topic under review. Dinesh Kumar presents "**History's Lessons: The Need for Strategic Thinking**" and makes a reference to "incredible incidents which highlight the sub-continental infirmities of strategic thinking, planning and gross lack of foresight". He illustrates his remark with examples that are widely known.

The interesting point to note is that our current knowledge what Muslims in India are exactly doing with an institutionalised base of crime and intrigue across the country right from Kashmir to Coimbatur to Kerala has not helped us to wake us up from our beauty sleep. No one seems to realise that for Islam religion is an art of warfare and is meant to keep others in

constant terror. People have known thus far through history how the marching hordes of Islam have put to sword countless millions. In the recent past what their forces have done in Dhaka could make any Abdali or Ghauri look like a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi or Vinoba Bhave.

The way our political leadership is solicitous of Muslims in India and is willing to flatter them in the most endearing of terms possible should make Indians suspicious of their real agenda. For a president of a socialist party the acts of terrorism are always organised by Hindu cultural outfits and for others any opposition to their pet 'secular' agenda smacks of communal overtones.

In brief, I resent Hinduism being defined in terms, which suits admirers of Islam and any claims made on its behalf by its followers — the Muslim fundamentalists. The way Muslims objected to modernization of Hinduism by Swami Dayanand is well known. How many precious lives and temples and properties have Hindus not lost in the Indian sub-continent for the demolition of an unknown structure and continue losing only for the so-called 'bruised' Muslims psyche as if 'bruised' psyche is an exclusive property of the followers of Islam. Across the sub-continent they have spread a reign of terror which is justified by our 'secular' leaders advancing the logic that while minority communalism is defensible its parallel in others is not.

I would end my references to Islam and to its followers in India by stating a couple of glaring inconsistencies in the logic of our rulers.

1. If Hindus and Muslims (the only minority community in India) must live in peace, it must not be overlooked that country got divided because of them and they want further divisions. As a proof I cite a letter from *Times of India* (April 3, 1998) "It (BJP) must understand that Hindu-Muslim unity and amity do not lie in assimilation but in mutual respect for each other as followers of two distinct religions and working out ... rules for coexistence...."

   Hindus and Muslims live in parallels societies (i.e. co-exist and do not live together) with only three channels open for communications with other communities either singly or in their varied combinations viz. sex, crime and politics. This is how they have lived and perhaps will continue living. The rest is polemics.

2. Muslims cannot live in peace in India. For hundreds of years Shias and Sunnis have fought with each other and this fight has no reference to Hindus but only to their own intolerance and exclusivity. Any moves in their religion to soften its harsh contours have been treated the Islamic way.

3. Indian Muslims have numerous Islamic countries to support their Islamic agenda and

fund them but no such possibility exists in the case of Hindus. The OIC can terrorise Indian government even as their co-religionists can the Hindus at will.

4. Whereas Islam is establishing its credentials as a religion of protest across the globe and has held the world to ransom for its ends, such an effort is not visible in any other community neither in India nor elsewhere.

It would be legitimate to remind ourselves of the fate of Salman Rushdi in England and Tasleema Nasreen in Bangladesh who tried to be less than fanatic, or of Shah Bano who dared to get justice from Supreme Court and remember that Indian Muslims who themselves are not acceptable anywhere in the world not even in Pakistan do not have the decency to accept even the dignified hospitality of their (own) country with grace.

I would also like that Hindus continue with their tradition of hospitality, tolerance and the ideals of living together (and not just co-exist) with others in peace — be they those who rarely show such feelings or are capable of such emotions. Logically and in fact what has been given to us as part of our history could never be wished away. We must remember that those insects, animals and humans who are dangerous to our life systems cannot be exterminated just because we may wish so. But that also does not mean that we may ignore the reality of their

existence who are not likely to be friendly ever or learn to behave the way we behave. For instance:

1. The division of our country was based on hatred and therefore to expect India and Pakistan could ever live in peace together is a cruel joke. The examples of German, Irish or Korean union are not applicable here. Neither race, language, culture nor history could possibly bring them together.

2. The secularists in India keep on overlooking the reality that whereas a non-believer can not even enter Mecca or Medina, Muslims not only live in Hardwar/Rameshwaram/Kashi/ Mathura etc., they have put their stamp of dominance on these places as part of our history. Could one expect them to let even a single place be free for Hindus alone?

3. A Yusuf could wish to go to Bosnia to fight and an Asghar Ali may like Muslims in Haryana to become more pure through their fundamentalist organisation called Tabligh is accepted as part of our liberal outlook but Hindus in India cannot even talk about what Tasleema records is in reality being practised in Bangladesh against Hindus or what the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan decries are the practices being adopted in Pakistan to finish off Hindus. I have yet to come across a single Indian organisation, let alone the Government of India bring any of

these facts to light by raising these issues, even on humanitarian grounds, in any of the world fora. If this is 'secularism' then what is 'cowardice' and 'stupidity' of the first order?

I have come to the conclusion that a secular Muslim is a logical impossibility even as calling a Hindu fundamentalist is devoid of substance.

I must also clarify that Hinduism needs no crutches to support itself since the world view of Hindus has always been of *"vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (world is a family), it could extend only a message of peace and tolerance.

Being a non-political person myself I would prefer restricting my discourse to Hinduism and not to its politics.

This book has not been attempted because I perceive Hindus to be living under threat from any other quarters except from their own ranks. I therefore recommend no ghetto mentality and would like every Indian (Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Jains etc.) to practice freely their faith and belief as they have always lived by and ignore politicians.

The third reason why I have written this small volume is that here I have attempted to present Hinduism both in its historical as well as contemporary perspective. Despite the passage of numerous centuries the essential core of Hindu rituals, beliefs and practices has remained unchanged. This is at once surprising and illuminating — surprising because without a

single universally acceptable written book to guide their conduct, Hindus have retained their cultural cohesiveness; and illuminating because this fact illustrates the point that purity of religion may not necessarily lie in pursuing a straight-jacketed course of behaviour with regular guidance from a priestly class or even a divine revelation. It does not mean that Hindus have no priests or Divine Books but the one's who follow its 'core' behaviour do not always respect either the priest or the Book/Books.

It is this continuity of an identifiable behaviour pattern of Hindus that has amazed many. The rich and the poor, the learned and the illiterate and the upper or the not so upper castes have all along had a certain common code to follow. The eternal flow of this culture has made scholars to call Hinduism 'a way of life' and not Religion, *per se.*

One is amazed at the knowledge of the facts science has given us thus far. They all point out that not only is this inhabited planet alone in the ever expanding universe but the life we have in itself has little meaning. We may have evolved from matter and grown to become humans but our thinking and behaviour have retained their original animal and materialistic traits. We are not willing to share our possessions with others — not even with the members of our own families. Perhaps religions and the creation of myths around them have lent us an aura of purpose and meaning to our existence. Ideally

we would and should wish to have peace around us and learn to live in amity and brotherhood. While this may theoretically be our goal in life but in reality it all remains a distant dream. At least thus far there is no proof that Socrates or Galileo, Jesus or Lord Krishna could live in peace in this world and be allowed to complete their earthly tenure unharmed.

What is therefore shocking is the realization that ideals may be set for achievement but those who attempt to do so have invariably been made to suffer for their pains? We may dream of a society wherein everyone may live in peace and harmony and behave the way s/he would like others to behave toward him/her — but like everything else in this world like dreams may never get transformed into reality. One is reminded of Raja Janak's dream and realises that Reality exists in a given context and not out of it.

Today Hindus find that even after multiple divisions of their country they are not allowed to live in peace not only because Muslims cannot live in peace anywhere in the world but also because the Hindus are faced with their own hostile co-religionists who being in power would love to persecute them remorselessly for acts of which the Hindus cannot be found guilty. Indeed, one of the additional reasons why this book has been attempted is to record all the abuses hurled at Hindus by their own leaders. What greater misfortune could fall on them than this — is a question whose answer I do not know.

Indeed, in this strange world there are more questions than answers. The root cause for this reality may lie in the human nature itself that generates knowledge through curiosity. I am curious to know what exactly is the nature of Hinduism. How does one define it or its followers?

But the principal reason why I have written this book is to record that almost in all ages Hinduism has had to face challenges towards its existence and no matter what the magnitude of these threats may have been it has survived and lives on. Whatever dangers Hinduism may face today there is no possibility that many harms could possibly come to it. Whether or not it would become a force to reckon with, I have no ready answers. It would be extremely interesting to examine the sources of threats it has faced thus far and feel amazed that nothing has ever succeeded in subduing, blunting its elan. Like a perennial stream of water the Sanatan Dharma has gone on quenching uniformly the thirst of all those who have come to its banks — unmindful of the designs or motives of its users. I find this fact absolutely illuminating.

CHAPTER - 2

THE SETTING : THE QUESTION OF HINDU IDENTITY

There are various strands in a contemporary debate about whether or not Hindutva could be defined to everyone's satisfaction, if yes, should it be allowed to form the bases for a political agenda? Relevant to this debate are a few additional arguments. For example, what constitutes the core of Hinduism? Is it a religion in the conventional sense of the term i.e. does it proselytize? Is there a scripture that all Hindus accept as the Book? Do they have some common code of conduct?

Whereas scholars have answered all these questions, still there are some that see Hinduism as a threat to national survival. Many of them are genuinely concerned about India's future. Like in every other branch of human activity and thinking there would always be a small group of sober, thinking and well-meaning people. Among the most outstanding professions like teaching, journalism and politics we are lucky to have a few who qualify on the stated criteria. It is only incidental that a few of these regard themselves better than their detractors.

I take this opportunity to present the setting of the on-going debate. Much though I dislike admitting I agree with Gunnar Myrdal who once said that objectivity is a myth perpetrated by the vested interests.

First on the question: Who is a Hindu? The answer to this question is not straight or very definitive. Hence, the rigmarole.

Swaminathan S. Ankelsaria Aiyar in his write-up on "Socialism is Casteism" (*Times of India*, 16 November 1997) discusses the Brahmanical (Nehruvian) view of life and states that "right through history, the Indian ideal did not glorify political and military and it looked down upon money and professional money-making class. Honour and wealth did not go together and honour was meant to go, at least in theory, to the men who served the community with little in the shape of financial reward".

This statement comes pretty close to describing Hindu mental make-up. Extending the said argument we have an excerpt from a letter by one R.P. Sharma from Shillong (*Times of India*, 14 November 1997) who wants K.R. Malkani to note "above all, that India is much greater than Hinduism and Hindus. Nationalism is essentially a politico-terrorist concept. Mr. Malkani, therefore, must not Hinduise Indian nationalism".

Syed Shahabuddin endorses Sri Sharma (*Times of India* 6 November 1997). "Today no identity—religious, linguistic and cultural—can be imposed over any group, however small, against its will, and it will not be so willing, unless and until that group sees its future in assimilation or submergence or absorption. The Muslim Indians do not see their future in these terms. They see their future in terms of identity, equality and dignity?".

A letter from Mumbai by one Nikhat Abbas (*Times of India,* 3 November 1997) once advised M.D. Nalapat not to use certain words or metaphors like Jhatka or Halal because the word Jhataka is essentially unscientific and represents a Hindu view against Halal which has a better scientific and religious base. She wrote"We respect Mr. Nalapat's right to his opinion, but he ought to have been more circumspect in his choice of metaphor, given the communally surcharged atmosphere which prevails in the country".

J.S Bandukwala from Baroda wrote (*Times of India,* 24 September 1997) to record his appreciation for a judge (Mr. J.P. Srivastava) who indicted a Hindu for inciting a mob "to frenzy against poorer and smaller community (of Muslims) and compared the VHP with Mr. M.A. Jinnah who too generated hate and violence against an entire community...." (*Times of India,* 30 November 1997). Anshuman Goenka from Cambridge (UK) in his letter titled "I am a Hindu too" takes on K.R. Malkani for his 'dreadful' article of October 20. In his confrontation he does some plain speaking on Hindu gods. (Lord) Ram, with his insistence on passing his wife through fire to ascertain her purity is ill-suited to play a hero for those who have a less orthodox view of morality than Malkani. Then, (Lord) Krishna, with his roving eye and display of Machiavellian strategy par excellence in the battle at Kurukshetra ... may also be distant from

the universal acceptability as role model which Mr. Malkani claims for him". Surely Goenka has read his Salman Rushdie and P.B. Shelley well.

Anil Nauriya (*Times of India,* 8 January 1998) reminds M.V. Kamath of his tribute he once paid to "giants of the Constituent Assembly of India" in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (July 6-12, 1980) of which he was then Editor. For that "galaxy of men and women" who drew up India's laws, Ayodhya was not an issue, let alone a major issue. In our contemporary setting Nauriya has discovered a divided intelligentsia frenetically obsessed with non-issues. According to him one section, under apparent inspiration from Anglocentric writings, tends to attack Indian nationalism as such at the drop of hat.... Another section, of which Mr. Kamath seems to be a part, collaborates with Hindu sectarianism by seeking to replace "Indian nationalism with Hindu nationalism". He cites Vir Savarkar's (August 13 1943) declaration, "I have no quarrel with Mr. Jinnah's two-nation theory. We, Hindus, are a nation by ourselves and it is a historical fact that Hindus and Muslims are two nations".

Being an advocate in the Supreme Court Nauriya dons the mantle of a Judge for the moment to deliver his judgement. "Neither those mechanically "contesting nationalism" nor those affirming faith in "Hindu nationalism" take account of the many who reject the underlying objects of both these factions. These paradigms were rejected even prior to Independence by

many among the Muslims, the Hindus and the rest. It will not be possible to build a social consensus around either".

Few dare contest this judgement except to say that the said Anglocentrics must include the two great Yadvas from UP and Bihar and to pray His Lordship to read his Badruddin Tyabji (the third President of INC) again, particularly his 1887 presidential address, which laid the foundation stone of 'two-nation' theory.

Kshemendra Upadhyaya tenders a piece of advice to those who would listen (*Times of India* 25 October 1997) "If Hindu fundamentalism defines itself in terms of a reaction to Muslim fundamentalism, bigotry will inevitably beget bigotry and close the doors to harmony and understanding". We have a very clearly defined 'Hindu identity in the language of Srichand P. Hinduja. According to him the word Hindu refers to all Indians who live in India similar to the words, Americans, British, Israelis etc. (*Times of India*, 11 December 1997). Mr. M.V. Kamath may have his admirers for writing 'Reclaiming Ram's' Birthplace (*Times of India*, December 22) one Vikram Kumar has this to say, "While discussing such acts of demolition by Muslim rulers, we shall not miss the context and nature of the medieval polity. If we go on interpreting and using our history for the purpose of settling scores from the past, we will be reduced to a nation of warring tribes". The context of advice is Mr. Kamath's basic question: "Is it the

argument that Hindus should never assert themselves but should give in to the new God 'secularism' (whatever that is supposed to mean) as once they gave in to Islamic invaders?" (*Times of India*, 22 December 1997)

What exactly do we mean by 'secularism'? Since it has lost its lexical connotation it somehow betrays numerous shades of meaning and is amenable to countless interpretations. Indeed, this term is like a mirror, which reflects honestly what comes in front of it. Sample a few comments.

One Mr. T.S. Raman would be interested in knowing whether 'Parasuram Shakti' award on May 23, 1997 to G.V.G. Krishnamurthy by Akhil Bhartiya Brahmin Mahasabha was a "demonstration of how 'secularism' could be practised in the Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic of India?" In his inimitable style Cho Ramaswamy writes on "Secularism Indian Style" (*Times of India*, 6 February 1998). His anxiety emanates from the fact that "the concept of secularism as accepted the world over is not going to convince the leaders of the various parties whose secularism is an indigenous product". Being what it is "the first item on the Indian secular agenda is the prevention of the construction of a temple for Ram in Ayodhya". The Indian secular agenda tackles next the suggestion for a "common civil code". The idea that there could be one law governing all citizens of the country is sure to divide the people. To be secular one should insist

on different laws for different communities. Item no. 3 on the Indian secular agenda is the question of Article 370 of the Constitution. "Only a communalist would refuse to see the force of logic in the argument that since Kashmir is part of India it cannot be treated on par with other parts of India". And finally "justice for all, appeasement of none" is a perfidious attempt to deny equality to the minorities.

Indeed one could easily stretch the arguments advanced by Cho to include a few unique examples of how 'secular' Hinduism has historically functioned in Free India. The Nehru-Gandhi parivar is not the only 'secular' family, there are countless others of the practising type. For examples, Jawaharlal Nehru was born into a Hindu family. His only daughter was a Parsi widow. One of her Parsi sons was married to a devout Roman Catholic and his children are baptised in the Catholic Church. Not only Rajiv and Sanjay are Hindu names they were cremated too with all the brahmanic last rites in full view of the nation. Indira Gandhi herself was given final farewell in the typical Hindu manner. Who says Hinduism does not encompass tremendous liberalism in outlook, elasticity in definition and pragmatism arising out of exigencies like power and pelf in real politico-social terrain?

In response to several papers which appeared in the *Times of India* written by K.R. Malkani such as "Ayodhya: December 6 Solved the Communal Problem" (October 13, 1997) in

which he cited Nirad C. Chaudhuri saying: "Muslims do not have the slightest right to complain about destruction of one mosque. From 1000 AD every Hindu temple from Kathiawar to Bihar from the Himalaya to the Vindhya has been sacked and ruined. No nation with any self-respect will forgive this", and V.S. Naipaul who incidentally has a Pakistani Muslim wife, declared "In Ayodhya the construction of mosque on a spot regarded as sacred by the conquered population was meant as an insult"; and in "Subversive Nationalism: Raising the BJP Bogey Again" (July 22, 1996) Malkani cites a letter by Arjun Singh dated December 1, 1992 to Mr. S. Rajgopal, Cabinet Secretary, quoting "an active Congress worker" there is "an indication that some agent-provocateurs from Pakistan have been able to penetrate into Ayodhya and would try to damage the Babri Masjid, if the VHP karsevaks fail in their mission to do the same." The resulting civil strife as a consequence of this event is "What Pakistan would have very much liked to happen" etc that Meenakshi Jain had to demand "Will the Real Malkani Please Stand up" (*Times of India*, July 29, 1996).

The popularity of the usage of the term 'secularism' is not because everybody who uses is its cognoscente but it serves his overt as well as hidden agenda. Particularly after December 6. The term Hindu has acquired numerous nuances each of a fascinating type. The Sanskrit saying

that "each head has its own mind" is demonstrated every time an intellectual journalist, an informed political leader or a highly goal-oriented academic finds an occasion to become nationally eloquent. It is something akin to what Omar Khayyam in Fitzgerald's translation once wrote: "Myself when young did eagerly frequent Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument/ About it and about; but evermore/ Came out by the same Door as in I went?"

One Professor U.N. Tewari from NOIDA through his letter (*Times of India,* 27 November 1997) has tried to establish the date of the death of 'secularism' in India. I wonder whether what he says has been noticed by others and one is not sure whether anyone agrees with him. Here is his version of the sad demise of 'secularism' and by implication the essential communal character of Indian politics and politicians must comprise the Indian voters. The reference is to a typical trick played by the INC (**Indian National Congress**) to have a person like Acharya Narendra Deva defeated from his home constituency, Ayodhaya by spreading a rumour that being an atheist Acharya would allow cow slaughter in this holy city. "The first brick from our secular edifice was thereby knocked out, nearly half a century ago". Of course he puts no date to the practice of rumour mongering in politics and whether or not, as many allege today, the R.S.S. did not borrow this honourable trait from an even more honourable INC.

No one has tried to establish that Mahatma Gandhi could easily qualify for being a great communal leader for his Ram Raj, Ahimsa, Vegetarianism, Practice of Celibacy, Maun (silence) etc. but almost universally the worshippers of Ram are regarded obscurantists, communal and socially retrogrades.

The strange logic advanced by our contemporary intellectuals is both revealing as well as rewarding. What they would want others to do they find it ever so inconvenient to practice or even admit that they just won't. For one thing, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is identified as a political wing of a "fundamentalist" Hindu outfit called Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh. The notoriety acquired by RSS is because it speaks on behalf of the Hindus and for their good. But nowhere does it say that it is opposed to others from other religions. For instance, it was neither CPM, CPI, SP nor INC, which went to help Muslims in Charki Dadari (Haryana), after a Saudi plane crash. At least one Muslim wrote in *Times of India* to acknowledge this fact but not the 'secularists' for an outcaste.

Prakash Nanda *(Times of India)* in his paper **Trial by Secularists' BJP Perpetually in the Dock** brings out this fact rather more succinctly. The criticism of BJP is akin to a white truck driver calling blacks "lazy brutes" when he noticed them taking rest and "savages" when they were seen to be loading 200 pound sacks of grain each onto a truck. If BJP forgoes its controversial agenda

it is accused of being a "betrayer of faith" and when it talks of the so-called "hidden agenda" i.e. of Mathura and Kashi, it is accused of being communal. In Nanda's words, "To explain Hindutva strictly in communal terms is again to oversimplify the issue. Whether it is right or wrong the fact remains that for pan-Indian party like the BJP or for that matter its previous incarnation, the Jan Sangh, Hindutva has been the slogan which it thinks can highlight the common cultural link of India in which forces of disintegration far outweigh those of unity. This was all the more so when it became politically correct to glorify narrow and limited concepts like caste and region".

M.D. Nalapat (*Times of India,* 21 January 1998) in his paper "Importance of Hindutva: Moderation the Key to Harmony' gives the reason for the rise of communalism in India. "By, in effect, belittling the Indian ethos articulated by Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel and Abdul Kalam Azad in favour of an outstandish amalgam of Fabian socialism, Marxism and European royalty, Nehruism, in fact, **nourished communalism rather than weakened it**" (emphasis mine). He goes on to give "another example of the continuation of the Mughal British Nehru policies in Kerala where the CPM government has proposed legislation to take over all major Hindu temples. Quite apart from the CPM's claim to being an atheist organisation, it is difficult to see the logic in singling out one community's

religious places for state control when Churches and mosques have (correctly) been left free. It is this anti-majoritarian definition of 'secularism' that has fuelled an inflow into Hindu exclusivist organisations"

In other words whether or not Hindutva is definable, its growth and birth have little to do with the people or its leaders who are largely accused of being the harbingers of Hinduism or Hindutva wave. Putting the entire thing/ argument in a perspective the identification of the INC by the followers of Sir Syed as a "Hindu" party and its (INC's) vehement denial but at the same time allowing its own leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lala Lajpat Rai and even earlier on Lokmanya Tilak to associate themselves with organisations like Hindu Mahasabha, Arya Samaj and Ganesh Puja respectively betrays not so much its duplicity but lack of a clear policy and vision. Today when majority of even well-read persons show tremendous ignorance of historical facts related to the necessity of the birth, rise and spread of organisations like RSS, BJP etc. one wonders how could one rectify the situation. Surely one cannot trust those political parties which have played a major role in the aforesaid genesis, for the simple reason that instead of looking within they keep on shouting 'wolf' every time they feel scared of their own bleak future.

Even more interesting is the fact that while the so-called pacifists from India demonstrate

at the Wagah border for Peace, Fraternity and Friendship between Pakistan and India they do not know how to show any concern for the Hindu carnage either in Panjab or Kashmir. Indeed, this Abu Ben Adam's tribe, which is on the increase, invited a rather pungent comment by M.D. Nalapat (*Times of India,* 18 December 1997). "Had such groups conducted an international agitation against the demolition of dozens of places of worship in Pakistan? Christian, Buddhist and Hindu places of worship have been destroyed in Pakistan? Have the Buddhists also been party or privy to the demolition of the so-called Babri Masjid?"

The pacifists and the liberal democrates in India would be well advised to refer to a write-up by Maroof Raza of NDTV (*Times of India,* 19 December 1997). "The truth lies in the fact that, Pakistan wants major territorial concessions from India in Kashmir — which India is neither willing nor is able to make—and without which, the hawks in Pakistan cannot be pacified. It is well known that Pakistan's best bonding adhesive is "anti-Indianism, not Islam and Kashmir issue is its symbol".

Mulkraj Anand (*Times of India,* 3 July 1998) shares an extract from (Pakistan) a review of Rafiq Zakaria's latest book brought out by Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan titled **The Price of Pakistan.** "What is of special interest in Mr. Zakaria's book is not his unforgiving contempt for Jinnah nor his unbounded admiration for

Nehru nor his misty-eyed reminiscence of Hindu-Muslim unity but rather his advice to Pakistan's government on Kashmir; What was a piece of land and a few million Muslim compared to the one hundred and forty million Muslims spread all over India whom partition has rendered forlorn and helpless!

He warns Pakistani leaders that "they fail to realise that if Kashmir went to them, the position of Indian Muslims, who were as many as Pakistanis, will become the target of Hindu chauvinism. Kashmir is the arsenal for their security. They are aware and they have seen that once religious fanaticism is inflamed, as happened in Bosnia recently, brute force takes over".

The final page has for requiem the following: "They know not whether partition was right or whether it was really wrong! All that they know who be in distress is that divide has become strong". If at all such a day were ever come to pass, in India everyone should know that for all this they, the Hindu secularists, who without understanding Hinduism or Islam incited both for their own ends

As Pakistan minister, Shahid Hussain visits 'militants' training camp along with other minister colleagues the headquarters of Lashkare-e-Taiba in Muridke on April 21, 1998 and are euphoric about their test firing of Ghauri missile, one should read Praful Bidwai's (*Times*

of India, 21 April 1998) 'Beggared by the Bombs' and Dileep Padgaonkar's 'Pakistan is Watching'. Dileep is a fairly informed journalist. "Since partition" he says, "a secular government in New Delhi has been an anathema to Pakistan. Its margin of manoeuvre was limited so long as the Muslims in India voted en masse for the Congress. With the Muslims drifting away from the party, Pakistan reckoned; the chances of a stable government in New Delhi would be considerably reduced. It gives a boost to retrograde elements in the Muslim community". He is therefore worried and suggests "Harmony between the Hindus and Muslims is the surest way to counter the pernicious theory". Interestingly, he even discovers an evolution in BJP because of its allies. Thus "by no stretch of the imagination the BJP can be described as gung-ho saffronites. But Islamabad cannot allow such caveats to question its central thesis".

Everyone is entitled to one's opinion and an irresistible desire to educate others, but who is going to answer the following questions.

1. In those countries where Islam does not allow a 'non-believer' to survive—does one come across lasting 'peace'?
2. Is there a single country be it China, Philippines, or Ceylon where Muslims are a minority community and yet do not demand a separate homeland and are they not always located in geographical concentrations? Who

gave these Muslims the concept of 'two-nation' theory?

3. If Hindus really believe that in India they are safe under their 'secular' leaders why should they want to vote BJP — a communal outfit?

4. Do these intellectuals not perceive the reality behind Islam? Is it not true that Islamic countries produce and supply "terrorism"? This state-supported terrorism has numerous buyers both among non-Muslim and Muslim countries. The export of terrorism has more advantages than manufacturing commodities that may require long-term education in Science and Technology. It takes much less time and consumes much less effort than the production of manufactured goods and services and also terrorism is a proven lucrative business.

5. Is it not a fact that the USA finds terrorism an alternative to its conventional wars in its effort to dominate the world? So long others are able to supply manpower it has no hesitation in supporting them financially and diplomatically.

6. Fanaticism and fundamentalism are essential character traits of certain religions. Neither affluence nor education plays a great role in all this. British liberalism hides behind her pretty and liberal face the Irish upheaval against Protestants of the Roman Catholics and a long history of Crusades. They have

had their skinheads and PNB squads. If others like them cannot keep a stiff upper lip does it really entitle the British to keep moralizing others on a related issue?

7. Not only Pakistan but also Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) passes all kinds of resolutions against India. Indeed, India, which has the largest population of Muslims and the Islamic militants, is always found guilty of misdeeds. But I have thus far not come across a single player, sportsman or a political office bearer from amongst the 'non-believers' in Pakistan. Does not anyone have the courage to say that we who have no laws to punish the guilty or establish anyone's guilt are also asked to put up with a body like Hurriyat — is it democracy or a practice in cowardice?

8. In almost all areas of national concern India has no freedom of action. Her Governments' function under international scrutiny and advice. Her Hindu population is threatened from outside and terrorised from within. Even a Hindu country like Nepal offers no hope in terms of moral support. On a 'lonely' planet the Hindus live in isolation and fear. The threats this time are not only external. The greater ones are from within. Why must it be so?

There could be many more questions of similar genre. But they all arise because Hinduism has no definition of its own. Its identity is what others have given it.

In this part of the rigmarole we should have the Muslim view of Hindus and Hinduism, their conditions for permitting Hindus to live etc. because my simple thesis is that there is a Muslim India which has its own rules for living and letting others live. Without really knowing what they say it would be extremely difficult to define what Hinduism is. Muslims after all are the only hostile, forever complaining major minority. Let us therefore record their voices in the original via a national newspaper, which cannot be easily blamed for being partisan.

Let me state here very clearly that all Muslim intellectuals in India do not share uniformly the same opinion about Hindus or would support Islam's fundamentalism or have sympathies with terrorists. It is also not true that Pakistan on its own can create trouble without financial backup from the Saudis and diplomatic support and military training by the USA. Left to it Pakistan may not succeed in luring even the Chinese in her game plan. The truth is that Muslims in China are concentrated on her south westerly border and are as much prone to import trained terrorists as their co-religionists here. Therefore what we witness today may not really be the religious or cultural face of Islam. One finds that state-supported terrorism is not only beneficial politically but economically it is very rewarding. What we see in Afghanistan today is only a tip of the iceberg. This could as well happen in Kashmir, Panjab or the northeast. Not that there

is any peace in these regions but the truth is in certain parts in India Pakistan has succeeded in creating a sound, well-oiled infrastructural mechanism.

We should therefore be careful about reading too much in what the liberal, Muslim intellectuals say because the Muslim masses cannot understand them, nor do the fundamentalists among them who stand on a shaky ground vis-a-vis the younger Muslim generation which refuses to bow down before such elements. It is also possible that numerically the vocal elements do not have any mass base. However, one is not quite sure that once either the liberals or the fundamentalists get an audience they will not succeed in persuading others to agree with their standpoint.

These caveats apart one should be quite sensitive and sensible to reflect upon what they say to one another and the bearing these statements have on the Hindus as a group or community which again is as non-homogeneous and clearly is as divided as perhaps the Muslims. Very few among the Hindus know that "there are 72 Muslim sects in Islam" (*Times of India*, 14 July 1997). On the same date C.M. Naim from Chicago wrote, "We must learn some lessons from Pakistan, where the Mullahs were allowed to have their way concerning Ahmadias by a 'socialist' politician desperate to protect his position. But that only enhanced the blood lust of the fanatics. Soon it turned out into anti-

Shia violence, which brought in turn anti-Sunni violence. Barelvis turned against Deobandis. A cry was raised to declare the Zikris non-Muslims. .... There is of course almost open season on the minuscule religious minorities of Christians and Hindus". Therefore Mehmood Jaswal asks an innocent question "I wonder who will be the next to be thrown out of the Muslim world?"(*Times of India*, 14 July 1997). Asghar Ali Engineer who is so fond of writing on Islam and its peaceful mission does not speak a single word on this subject instead he declares that "the real *jihad* lies in striving to control our own negative tendencies" (*Times of India*, October 1 1997). Well, really?

The Hindustan Times (March 15, 1997) carries a paper by Sultan Shahin on "Muslim Attitudes' wherein he holds Nehru responsible for the creation of Pakistan. "Congress politicians are adept at turning national disasters into political opportunities. (Nehru) a consummate politician, who had just turned the disastrous two-nation theory into an opportunity to get rid of Jinnah and millions of troublemakers with the clout to demand a share in power". Incidentally the sad aspect of the genesis of Pakistan is that today one of its own academicians. Mubarak Ali (*Times of India*, 29 October 1997) comments "Pakistan was created on the philosophical plank that all Muslims of the Indian subcontinent are one nation and Pakistan would be their ideal homeland. History

proved it wrong when East Pakistan parted ways and we now continue to shed blood between Mohajirs and Sindhis". He goes on to record "this ethnic, large-scale bloodshed has finally buried the very basis of Pakistan".

Many in India would love to echo Ali's sentiments. Professor Mushirul Hassan who once faced the wrath of Jamia's Muslim students believes that "Muslim communal Politics has no future in India" (*Times of India,* April 13, 1997). Countering the claims of many a BJP leader Taran N. Khan declares that "Muslims prefer secular over identity politics". The claims that "Muslims are turning to the BJP due to disillusionment with the 'secular' politics and backstabbing by the Congress are grossly exaggerated". (*Times of India,* March 2, 1998) In continuation of what Taran Khan says, Irfan Ahmad reported (*Times of India,* 1 April 1997)) in his paper "**A New Agenda for Muslim Radicals**", which I am quite sure was missed by many, that in 1997 March under the banner of Milli Parliament at Hubli in Karnataka Muslim radicals resolved to launch a separate Muslim political party to accomplish world Khilafat based on Islamic Sharia. They feel insecure regarding their symbols of identity — Urdu, AMU and Personal Law. "The three organisations — Milli Parliament, Students Islamic Movement and Students Islamic Organisation (SIO) are out to mould opinion in favour of Islam, as all-encompassing worldview". Besides Karnataka

they have their base in Bombay, Kerala and elsewhere. In this context Asghar Ali Engineer's paper on "**Democracy and Identities**" carries a very dangerous message. "The politics of identity plays an important role in the democratic process. It has an emotional basis and its politicization has a greater emotional impact... various identities — religious, caste and region — are shaping the politics of the country".

In his paper "**Religion and Culture**" Professor T.K. Ommen talks of the identity markers (*The Hindustan Times*, January 11, 1998), such as religion, language, tribe etc. Because Muslims and Christians in India are associated with foreign domination they are suspects in the Hindu eye and therefore quite unwillingly they have to acquiesce perforce to declare that they are Indians first and Christians or Muslims afterwards. He by saying so could easily strike a sympathetic chord in the heart of Syed Shahabuddin. Though a sociologist he is advised to read some standard historical works too to get his facts right both about the birth of Pakistan and the genesis of Hindu attitudes.

I have always maintained that a Muslim is one who has full faith in Allah, His messenger and the Holy Book. Anyone who holds views contrary to what is true Islam is no Muslim. Today I stand endorsed by Mohd. Hashim Kidwai (*Times of India*, 27 March 1993). "These (Liberals) Muslims are half-Muslims, because

they deny the fundamentals of Islam, preach blasphemy, do not believe in the **separate** identity of Muslims, some of them have gone to the extent of denying the existence of Muslims as a monolithic community. The vast majority of Muslims will never accept such persons as their leaders. They want to follow their religion and retain their identity and are prepared to undergo sacrifices for these objectives". He does not of course say but would love to endorse the SIM and SIO wholeheartedly.

What Girilal Jain wrote in November 19, 1992 "Islam in Pakistan: Fundamentalist forces gain Upper Hand" is common knowledge. Would he be surprised if the *Organiser* reported on 27 March 1993 that there is a Muslim invasion on India and Swami Vivekananda had once said (Vol. IV, Page 126) "Now some Mohammedans are most sectarian.?" Their watchword is "There is one God and Mohammed is his Prophet". Everything beyond that is not only bad, but must be destroyed forthwith at a moment's notice, every man or woman, who does not exactly believe in that, must be killed; everything that does not belong to this worship must be immediately broken; every book that teaches anything else must be immediately burnt. From the pacific to the Atlantic, for five hundred years, blood ran all over the Mohammedans, wherever there was a philosophic man, he was sure to protest against these cruelties". The Swami had foreseen the reality of Islam and its **true peace:**

"Why, anybody who is not a Mohammedan will not be admitted into the brotherhood; he will more likely have his throat cut". He nearly described what Hashmi Kidwai would be writing one day.

Outlook in its December 22, 1997 issue carried a write-up by A.S. Panneerselvan and Venu Menon titled **"The Serpent in Paradise"** in which they brought out how fringe militant groups have exploded to the surface with a series of blasts in the once peaceful south. They talked of radical Islamic groups operating openly in north Kerala and are suspected to have links with extremist outfits in Tamil Nadu. Did any one anticipate what they could do in Coimbatore? The reporters had noticed the irony of the whole case in the peace which apparently prevailed in Tamil Nadu after what the Muslims have come to describe 'the shahadat of Babri'.

Muslims blame Hindus and others for not appreciating the concept and practice of peace which is characteristic of Islam. The evidence available unfortunately does not support any such claim. The role 'model' for Muslims in India not only does not know how to live in peace but also has found it ever so profitable to export 'terror' across continents. Her Islamic soldiers not only fight in Chechnya but are ready to cross the borders of the Uzbek and Tazik territories. Already her Madrasah-trained students (the Talibans) have captured power in Afghanistan. Indian Madrasahs are not far behind. Hopefully

some day they would also learn to spread their wings (Read, Arun Shourie, "Pakistan, Brotherhood and Equality", August 8, 1997 *Dainik Jagran*). All this is not to say that any pagan/'non-believer' could ever stand up to Islam in this region (*Times of India*, 22 October 1996 Pagan tribes with a unique way of life struggle to survive in Pakistan). In India Muslim invasion on other's property and every historical monuments finds no law or any other support forthcoming (*Times of India*, 7 February 1997).

My presentation thus far should have helped the reader to decide that for the sake of living in peace in India whether or not 'non-Muslims' have to modify their behaviour or attitudes towards the followers of Islam. The expectations from others of Muslims in India are on the increase. One of the major complaints and a source of grouse of Muslims has been that why do not the non-Muslims overlook the destruction of temples and places of worship as the natural outcome of Muslim invasion and occupation of India because they were basically not fundamentalists and why cannot Hindus learn the real truth about Aurangzeb that the imposition of Jezia was not because he was a fanatic but a devout Muslim. (**Read**, Asghar Ali Engineer) and probably in the interest of state. Every intellectual in India is convinced that for future amity and peace the medieval behaviour of Islam need not be responded to and that VHP which is an obscurantist and therefore a dangerous

organisation should be asked to live with the symbols of past humiliations. After all Muslims are a backward community. They are also poor. The Muslims in India should be allowed to retain their identity, their symbols of culture and sources of pride and by the same token this accommodation must come from Hindus because they are not only numerically larger but are presumably richer and more forward community.

Even more interestingly the arguments in favour of accommodation of Muslim perceptions have **three** major underlying assumptions.

(a) Liberality is the sign of modernism and if one wishes to have European standards of living one must also follow their norms.

(b) India has a long tradition of tolerance and acceptance of all kinds of cultures and living. The non-Muslims have a moral obligation to remove their mental blocks towards the Muslims. After all India's diversity is the ground for unique unity. Diversity includes 'separate and even hostile' identities.

(c) India's secularism and her 'composite culture' are internationally known. In order to maintain her image 'abroad' we should rise above minor considerations and major irritants.

I suspect that these lofty ideals have to be defined first so those ordinary mortals may learn to live within given parameters.

One could easily challenge these assumptions because they are not properly informed. Let me take them up seriatim:

1. Even Great Britain which has had it share of Crusades is facing terrorism on grounds of sectarianism. They too have their 'white wolves' and skinheads, not unlike USA's **Ku Klux Klan**. So long they have prosperity it is possible to remain liberal. The Asians and Europeans and the English have life-styles that co-exist even as Muslims and Hindus do. Like us they too live in parallel worlds with very few open channels of communication among them. In that sense we are already where many of our friends in India would want us to be.

2. What exactly is the meaning of 'composite' culture we are definitely not very clear about it? A.R. Momin of Mumbai University in his paper "**Composite Culture is not just Skin-deep**" in a rejoinder (*Times of India*, 25 August 1998) to a paper by Professor T.N. Madan (*Times of India*, April 4, 1998) titled: "Composite Culture: Inadequacies of Secular Response" says ", the latter can be faulted on four counts". Then he goes "to answer Madan point by point. Firstly, since ancient times, Indian civilization has drawn many streams of migrant population, to its fold,

These groups underwent an extensive process of indigenisation. At the same time they also made significant contribution to the enrichment of Indian civilization". Secondly, Madan identifies India's composite culture with the life-style of the urban aristocracy in northern India and says that it represented "the efforts of the Hindu upper castes to move socially closer to the Muslim ruling class". In fact according to Momin it is the Sufis who 'played a catalytic role in the development of regional languages', as well as bringing the two communities together. Thirdly, the composite culture could be seen in music, literature and art which has "transcended narrow, religious and sectarian identities. Finally, Prof. Madan is wrong in imagining "that composite culture is a thing of the past". But Momin discovered that in a recent study conducted by the Anthropological Survey of India under the 'People of India' project "a very high percentage (96.77) of material and cultural traits relating to ecology, economy and occupation, Indian Muslims share with Hindus". His question is why must anyone ignore this reality?

Prof. A.R. Momin's question is both reasonable and correct. The answer lies in the demands of Muslim leadership for retaining their separate identity. The answer partly lies in the way India's so-called 'secular' parties have propagated 'communalism'. The historical

reality is that majority of Indian Muslims are **dalit** converts who embraced Islam because of Hindu Varna Vyavastha. The Muslim aristocracy consisted of Islamic warriors of foreign origin as well as the local ruling caste converts. The presence of dalits amongst Muslims is a legacy of their past original Hindu lineage. Therefore the resemblance of cultural traits among Hindus and Muslims is easily explainable. What must be noted by Professor Momin is the fact that there is a greater commonality of traits among the Hindu and Muslim dalits than their upper and middle classes, even as this commonality is more noticeable among rural populations than in the metropolitan areas. Mr. Momin must also attempt to address himself to the question : who exactly is raising the issue of a separate Muslim identity and why?

Someday Mr. Momin will realise that the 'identity issue' has been raised more by Muslims than Hindus because it has been far easier in the case of Muslims to define their distinct identity than those of Hindus for the simple reason that whereas the educated and upper class Muslims stand to gain by so doing it than their Hindu counterparts. The more one goes deeper into this question, the more one finds a sinister plan to further fragment the country. What therefore goes against the correct findings of the ASI Survey are the demands for separate electorates for Muslims and job quotas? The question therefore is : if Muslims are not a

distinctly different group with identifiable traits how can they have job quotas because Islam does not believe in castes and class and they definitely have both and a kind of class exploitation parallel to what the Hindus have ("**Beyond Belief**" by V.S. Naipaul) as reported in *Times of India*, 1 May 1998.

The 'identity' of a Hindu is therefore dependent upon the 'identity' of other citizens of India who happen to have one but they claim that they are ever so different from him/her not unlike the Charvakas whose philosophy is today known through the extant philosophical literature which discovered more its negative elements and questionable premises than the original text of its seer. Hinduism today stands defined by others and the 'identity' accorded to it by its critics than its own advocates/admirers.

Dr. Tara Chand was probably the first Indian historian to have produced a historical volume on Muslim contribution to India's culture and the way its 'compositeness' could be established. While there is no dearth of material being produced in the same vein even today there are other contestants to the claim of 'separateness of identities'. Whether one liked or not India, it is asserted, consists of people who have several distinctly different identities. For instance, the external appearance of a man or woman is one indicator of his/her identity. In this case the Sikhs though a highly vibrant modern community define their identity in term of five k's (Kesh,

Kada, Kachcha, Kripan and Kanghi). The Christians are known through their Church and the Holy Bible.

The Muslims in India have been given their identity by their leaders be they who led them before 1947 or after. It is quite another matter that this identity becomes considerably diluted where they do not follow the dictates of their own mullahs and the Tablig.

Currently they are being commonly recognised by an inferior identity to those of their superior bı ətherns in the Middle East. Meenakshi Jain while countering Danial Latifi's claim that all Muslims are equal wrote (*Times of India,* March 1997). "It bears reiteration that the Arab world began to practice discrimination within a few decades of the passing away of the Prophet and this attitude became more marked under the Unayyads in the seventh and eight centuries". In fact a Moroccan historian Ahmad Khalia Nasiri while describing the slave trade "as one of the worst and greatest abominations against religion recorded its wide prevalence among Mediterranean lands and West Asia until the beginning of the 20th century. Needless to say the Muslims from India do not enjoy the status that others have elsewhere.

V.S. Naipaul (*Times of India*, May 1 1998) "Revealed religions made their impact because of their social content. They talked about noble things, brotherhood, charity, that was, of course,

at the beginning. Religion is being used as a political weapon or as means of threat, as part of power play internal and at times, external. In Pakistan, I wanted to see how the Muslim homeland worked. Well, it has not worked out".

Firoz Bakht Ahmed (*Hindustan Times,* 19 November 1992) called the setting up of an Urdu university 'as utopian' because there was no necessary infrastructure available for sustaining it. He concluded his argument by pointing out that 90 per cent of the Muslim population study in their 30000 Madrasahs whose condition is not very happy. "The Urdu university can serve the language better as well the objective of Muslims' education only if it is preceded by efforts to improve Urdu schools, madrasas and maktabs".

On June 28, 1997 a survey appeared in the *Times of India* of the educational backwardness of Muslim community. It also carried criticism of the Muslim intelligentsia "for not being responsible to the community". The critic was M. Afzal, M.P. However the Editor of *Nai Duniya,* Shahid Siddiqui criticized politicians projecting themselves as leaders of the community. "They have been busy wheeling and dealing, treating the individuals a commodity and neglecting the long term interests of the community". The overall scenario "the bulk of the community is in slumber ... numb to its educational needs" disheartened one Mr. Kaokab Durry. Therefore it is no surprise that Iqbal N. Ansari declares that Muslims are in need of an affirmative action

(*Times of India*, 16 October 1997) and goes on to state that "prima facie a case of discrimination against Muslims can be easily established by considering the share of Muslims in the States' patronage system".

What comes out clearly is that the Hindus in India have an identity, which is distinctly different from those of Sikhs, Christians and Muslims etc. It is only logical to have an image of a Hindu through the eyes of others. That is, unlike the Sikhs they have an exterior different from the Sikhs, do not go to Church like the Christians and are not educationally as backward as Muslims and probably enjoy a non-discriminatory share in the state patronage. Even though Urdu is a 'secular' language it is not identifiable with the Hindu or his culture.

Even greater clarity should come in the Charvaka sense when one considered the well-defined traits of Muslim identity and their grounds of sensitivity. We all know how much Muslims in India were once incensed on the question of their Khalifa having been arrested. The Muslims had risen in revolt then. The sensitivity of Muslims to their religious icons is possible to contrast with Hindu insensitivity toward the arrest of their Sankaracharya or the Sikh sensitivity regarding their Golden Temple. Therefore the other traits which Hindus do not share with any other religious group in India is their insensitivity toward their own religious symbols or their icons. More Hindus condemn

VHP or the Ram Mandir than those who admire or want the construction of Ram Mandir do. On this score there is an open season within Hindu community, therefore one would fail to decide who is a Hindu or a non-Hindu. One would like to have as clear-cut a definition of Hindu 'identity' as the Muslims have. A Hindu would find it difficult to be as emphatic as a Muslim could: "We are a nation with a distinctive culture and civilization, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of value and proportion, legal laws and moral codes, customs and calendar, history and tradition, aptitude and ambitions; in short, we have our own distinctive outlook on life and of life. By all canons of international law we [Muslims] are a nation." Let us be very clear in this respect: Hindus have absolutely nothing to advance in their support of a commonly acceptable 'identity'.

This rigmarole has brought us to a point where we could easily fix the parameters of our discourse. We walk on a highly contestable terrain with the possibility of establishing an identity we may like to give to the Hindus. No single religious leader or a single book on morality or a commonly acceptable Scripture is available to support a 'Hindutva' identity. Therefore if we have on the one hand an Indrajit Gupta, or I.K. Gujral or a Sitaram Kesari who denounce the concept of Ramjanma Bhoomi or Ram Mandir, on the one hand we have others

who are willing to go to any length to realise their religious dream. I am quite amused at the remark of a Pakistani historian that while the Muslim League successfully tried to keep itself away from Muslim religious issue (of Khilafat), the Congress set out to embrace it" (Mohd. Saleem Ahmad, *The All-India Muslim League,* p. 201, Ilham Publishers, Bahawalpur, Pakistan, 1988). So assiduously have the INC Presidents followed this trend that the *Hindustan Times,* (31 October 1995) had to reprimand editorially ("Enough, Mr. Kesari") by stating: "In sharp contrast to Mr. Kesari's communal approach, the Hyderabad conclave (of Muslims) proposed to uplift the poor Muslim masses through educational and job-oriented schemes".

The face of 'secularism' in Indian polity is smeared with communal mud. A small digression on this issue is necessary to focus our attention on Hindu identity. The term 'secularism' is a Western importation because it was first used to contrast the state power with the Church domain. In its long struggle with the hegemony of Church over the state both France and England devised ways to overcome ecclesiastical networking. Sumit Sarkar while writing on the roots of secularism and declaring that it is neither a totally westernised concept nor an elitist one says (*Times of India,* 26 March 1993). "Secularism in its broadest sense of tolerance and respect for faiths other than one's own may even have had a longer ancestry in

India than in Europe". According to Mr. Sarkar Gandhiji was closer to secularism than Golwalkar. He goes on to contrast what the two had to say regarding Hindu religion and communal harmony. With the help of a quote from Golwalkar's book **We or Our Nationhood Defined** (1935) in which he had declared "In Hindustan exists, and must exist, the ancient Hindu nation, and nought else but the Hindu nation... the foreign races in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence the Hindu religion" etc., he then defines 'fascism' and identifies any one talking about Hinduism ' a 'racist' and murderer of Gandhiji. Gandhiji's quote according to Mr. Sarkar is the very core of 'secular' ideal, "before I ever knew anything about politics in my early youth, dreamt the dream of communal unity of the heart, I shall jump in the evening of my life, like a child, to feel that the dream has been realised in this life". (From a prayer meeting on January 14, 1948 in Delhi).

I have no wish to contest Mr. Sarkar's conclusion except to say that if Golwalkar does not symbolise Hinduism so does not Mahatma Gandhi 'the ideal' of communal harmony. After all did not Gandhiji invite the sharpest of tongue-lashings from a host of Muslim leaders and others as a 'Hindu communalist' despite all this?

The point to remember is not who says what on 'secularism' or 'communalism' but the fact

that both have their eloquent detractors and these individuals are not ordinary mortals. It would be equally feasible for any thinking individual to take sides and tear apart the very base of their opponent's information and ridicule the premises advanced by either with the choicest of invectives.

In the heat of debate one should not forget that rarely do the Indian masses listen to these intellectuals or show any empathy with them. Life has gone on as it did for the past thousands of years of India's recorded history. Religions have come, flourished and co-existed in their parallel domains — with only a few channels of communication having been kept open for each other. Whereas like Christianity, Buddhism and Sikhism, Islam too welcomes conversions — both forced and voluntary but Hinduism being what it is has no system for proselytizing and conversion. If there is a single trait by which Hinduism could be defined it is its non-acceptance of a convert even with the pedigree of a Hindu. I do not see any other single trait, which could define Hinduism better than this 'violent' non-acceptance of a convert within its fold. One can leave it but one is not welcome back. This is one of those unique features, which can hardly ever go unnoticed. Except for those born into it and others from having been barred entry Hinduism is surely more exclusivist than any elite club. This is at once its strength and weakness.

CHAPTER - 3

CONQUERING DEATH : ON TRADING NATION FOR PERSONAL GAINS

If one were to believe historians and history Hinduism has been dead (or in utter ruins) for ages. What therefore one sees or comes across is the veritable ghost of its past 'live' form. One is unsure to date that position. However, a few examples of the said genre are cited below.

Needless to say that all-Semitic religions have difficulty in understanding religio-cultural systems like Hinduism largely because they defy categorisation. The Muslim world-view situates humans into two categories: the believers and the non-believers or the faithfuls and the infidels. Islam believes that persecuting the infidels is an act of 'sabab' and 'jihad' is their moral obligation. This persecution-mania among Muslims is not as subtle as the Christians possess. The presence of 'violent hostility and intolerance' puts Islam on top of all known decimators of Hindus and their way of life. Indian history is replete with the show of their acts of cruelty against Hinduism and wherever and whenever they got an opportunity to exhibit their 'real' self, they have never hesitated to be 'ghazi's and become role models. **Himalayan Gazetteer** Vol. II records a 19th century incident of Dun Valley, Hardwar when a Rampur prince was invited by a Rajput king to help him conquer a territory back. The Muslim soldiers under their general looted a Hindu temple first, killed the priest and had cow's blood sprinkled all over. The witness was Edwin T. Atkinson who was both shocked and amazed at the way 'help' was administered.

After Muslims, came the Christian missionaries, Christian traders were followed by their eventual rule over India which lasted in certain parts over a couple of centuries. Though quite mild mannered and surreptitious their approach, their zeal for conversion of the 'native barbarians' was no less vigorous than that of their Muslim counterparts. Indeed, their appeal, to begin with, did not look all that aggressive and hostile because they brought their sermonising close to the local's hearts through the use of dialects and vernacular languages. Some of these priests learnt Sanskrit and translated India's ancient literature into the language of the laity.

Arun Shourie has brought out a detailed analysis of the work these missionaries did in India and their observations on the religious and political conquest of India (**Missionaries in India: Continuities; Change, Dilemmas**, ASA, New Delhi). Charles Trevelyan while writing on Hindu society talked of the Brahmanic thralldom over the people because of their monopoly of learning. Since the Company had opened schools, he declared. "They cannot return under the dominion of the Brahmins. The spell has been broken. Hinduism is not a religion, which will bear examination.... Hinduism is the only remaining great system of ideology and, of all the religions which mankind has invented for them, it has gone furthermost in deifying human vice and holding out its impersonations as objects of imitation and worship. From murder to petty larceny every

crime has its patron in the Hindu pantheon. The pickpocket quotes Krishna pilfering the milkmaids, the swindler adores Ganesha, the prostitute glories in her profession, and officiates at the service of all gods, although she is a special devotee of Kami, the Hindu Venus. All these, however, are trifles compared with the abominations behind. Many years ago some experienced Government officers and devoted missionaries at Calcutta formed an association for the purpose of exposing and discouraging cruel and demoralising (Hindu) practices...."

Max Muller while writing to Duke of Argyll in 1868 declared "India has been conquered once, but India must be conquered again, the second conquest should be a conquest by education". That education had to be designed for conversion. They believed "How long this living death of national religion in India may last, no one can tell: for our purposes however, for gaining an idea of the issue of the great religious struggle of the future, that religion (Hinduism) too is dead and gone".

As late as 1952 after India had attained her freedom and a highly enlightened Cambridge educated Prime Minister ruled India one Rev. Rice when asked by a Select Committee on Indian Territories the question "It is understood that your institutions are distinctly intended to produce conversion of the children?" answered,

emphatically "Decidedly". On January 27, 1545 Francis Xavier had written, "when all are baptized/order all the temples of their false gods to be destroyed and all the idols to be broken in pieces, I can give you no idea of the joy feel in seeing this done, witnessing the destruction of the idols by the very people who but lately adored them".

What the sword of Islam and the destruction of Hindu idols and temples could not accomplish the missionaries in India succeeded to a large extent through westernising Indians. And yet for all the combined efforts of the mighty rulers Hinduism has not only survived but also lives on in the hearts and minds of countless Indians. This time however Hinduism faces no external threat. There are no zealous invaders with swords in their hands and the hordes of trampling hoofs behind them and neither are any guns in sight accompanied by thousands of enthusiastic missionaries out to convert the 'native' barbarians — instead what we have are the most open-minded, tolerant 'secular' leaders ably supported by countless intellectuals raring to exterminate the 'virus' of Hindu communalism. Interestingly, for them only Hindus are 'communal' and others are not and probably 'cannot' be one.

The unfortunate part of this effort is its built-in failure from the start. They should first learn about that 'core' of Hinduism, which has proved so indestructible. What is it that makes this way

of life so fascinating to lead and why do these people find so suffocated in the 'light and mission' of other religions? Is Hinduism a Religion? Why do not people who are so well informed about everything else, know anything or even very little about Hinduism and its followers? Do they really know that if life had any purpose it lies in living itself and not in its destruction?

I suspect the reason of all this highly 'purposive' mission lies in not understanding the very purpose of our existence. Why do we live? Who are we? What is Death? Are we the only living beings and what lies beyond this Heaven or Earth? Are all questions logical and can logic answer them all?

Numerous treatises on the nature and character of Hindus and their society are available in libraries to read. I have no intention of repeating what others have already said or written. My reason for writing this volume is simple. I cannot answer all questions concerning Hindus or their cultural practices. Neither can I define what has been considered beyond any definition. I am attempting to describe the challenges Hinduism is facing today and these challenges emanate from those who ought not to be doing what they are doing. I dare not call them contemporary Jaichands because Jaichand was not as well-informed as these people are and neither had he the support of 'intellectuals' who in their zeal for enjoying perks and glory of fame have turned their back from

reality. History records the names of the elites and rulers and even the life-style of the commoners but not of those who sell their conscience for transitory gains.

Let me illustrate a major challenge that Hindus in India are facing today. It is extremely difficult to take positions or define their viewpoints without the possibility of being branded. I take at random national English daily the *Times of India* (8 May 1998) which I am told has a large readership. Even a minimally informed Indian would know that English is the language of middle and upper classes of India and these classes constitute the ruling or controlling elites besides the aspirants to power of all kinds including ill-gotten money and pelf.

For once let the news items and various write-ups of a single newspaper on a given day speak for themselves and let me ask anyone who claims logic and objectivity his/her forte decide for him/her self.

A Times of India Human Rights Cell reports under a sub-heading "Hindus face persecution in Pakistan", cases of Hindu girls aged 13 and 15 being abducted and raped and thereafter converted to Islam and married. "Such incidents are recurrent", says the report. Further it cites of a case when a widow of Bhojo Meghwar of Goth Kachhelo wanted to self-immolate alongwith her two minor sons against two influential people — no FIR was registered and

they were threatened to silence. Instances of Judiciary's help being of no avail in such cases have been documented in the report.

We have a write-up by Sunil Sethi 'On Culture Cops' who compares BJP/Shiv Sainiks/Bajrang Dal with 'apparatchiks' of the old Soviet Union "who believed that State control began with mind-control and calls them the cultural "commissars of the Indian state". He goes on to write "everyone from Mumbai's ruling Thackerays to information and broadcasting minister Sushma Swaraj and even-the-here-today-gone-tomorrow Prasar Bharathi C.E.O. S.S. Gill consider themselves the paramount authority on what music people should hear, which plays and concerts they should see, which pictures painters should paint, how TV presenters should dress and which TV shows mitigate [sic] [militate?] against Indian 'culture'. The real cause of Sunil's provocation is "If it were not for the incidents of physical intimidation and violence against Ghulam Ali and M.F. Hussain, some of the remarks by the self-appointed guardians of morality and culture would be dismissed as the fading bleat of politicians and executives paralysed by their diminishing authority". I would like readers to note the offensive terms used in the cited write-up for their effectiveness and contempt.

There are three letters to editor on Muslims and their plight in India. Whereas one M. Hussain from Delhi expressed his sorrow about Muslims,

having failed "to play an active role in building their community and their motherland" and also for a lack of leadership among them. In another letter Salman Sultan and M.N. Beg from Azamgarh (U.P.) lament the fact that "Muslims are out of governing structures, out of the executive and even out of schools and colleges. Even Urdu, a language born and bred here, is discriminated against because of its past association with Muslims."

The third letter is by Rajendra Chopra from Faridabad who after submitting 'humbly' to Mr. Firoz Bakht Ahmed that Maulana Azad was not only his, "he belongs to the whole country" and Ahmed must stand warned at the same time though he may be with BJP today — his newly acquired relationship is going to be temporary because BJP's "hatred for all secularists in general and the Muslims in particular is intact". Perhaps a student of history Chopra has learnt from that discipline "that fascists never drop their agenda, they only defer it". Looks like he has read several volumes on Hitler and Mussolini and found striking similarities with Bajpai's poems or Advani's agenda.

Then we have M.D. Nalapat's edit page paper counseling what BJP should do a la Oliver Goldsmith's "She stoops to conquer". His paper is titled **"Changing to conquer: Adjusting the BJP to Indian Polity"**. The paper contains a piece of advice for BJP on the "need to identify and actualize the course corrections required for

their party to replace the Congress as the natural beneficiary of the public trust". While everyone in India knows what China did to India in 1962 and also the fact that "China covertly helps Pakistan with strategic weapons against India" and encourages insurgency, especially in the north-east and is the primary strategic partner of the ISI in its drug-financed terrorism", Nalapat finds it difficult to understand why "The INC has joined the CPM in supporting Beijing in a confrontation with Indian interests". He reports on the presence of a strong "China lobby in New Delhi and the flood of journalists, academics and others visiting Beijing as state guests". In joining hands with this class of people the Congress party "has given the BJP an opportunity". The BJP thereby stands to gain in the process provided it can knit together "these strands for future."

Reading a national daily like *The Times of India* on a single day with all these news items, analyses and communications I am quite confused about the message I have been able to gather. What do I call these 'secular' pro-Muslim, pro-Pakistan and pro-China individuals and India-baiters? Are they our role models? Does one accept their definition of Hindus and Hinduism? Does one expect these gentlemen to protest even on behalf of India to either Pakistan/ China? At least Jaichand had his people and territory to protect but what are these people protecting?

If 'secularism' means being anti-Hindu and anti-India attitudes surely its proponents deserve the cake. Or don't they?

No one could discuss 'Hinduism' or 'Hindutva' — both terms being used by India's self-proclaimed defenders of 'secularism' and Indian Muslims without examining their own position first. Indeed, anything related with a Hindu has become an object of derision and even contempt for being illogical, ritualistic, retrograde, obscurantist and reactionary.

What do these secularists say and how do they define Hindus or Hinduism? It would be interesting to examine their position first. Let me state emphatically that for this class of intellectuals 'secularism' means 'pro-Islamic' standpoint and the term 'minority' denotes 'Muslims'. I am not aware how this strong lobby has brought about paradigm shifts in other disciplines but I know for sure that in post-independent India both in the disciplines of History and Political Science they have contributed substantially by branding all those who disagree with them as 'communalist' or a Hindu a fascist — all these terms being used synonymously.

One or two examples each from these disciplines should suffice for the purpose. Before I am condemned for being 'selective' in my choice of examples let me explain that these examples have a perennial character all their

own. For example, historians could never ignore the 1857 revolt against the British rule even as no one could forget the stature and status; the Indian National Congress enjoyed in nation's history. These examples therefore do not constitute minor matters and consequently could not be brushed aside as irrelevant.

Numerous volumes have been written on the 1857 event — a few being official and the rest non-official. Historians will remember how Professor R.C. Majumdar was dropped for writing on behalf of the Government of India and his replacement selected. But all this is beside the point. The revolt against foreign rule is projected to be combined and the efforts in this direction of Indians coordinated. The Hindus and Muslims had buried their differences until then such as, their mutual hatred, distrust and animosity and raised their banner of freedom as a united people. But is this correct? If it is not correct why do 'the secular', ('court historians,') say something else? Indeed, over the years the reality has been so much suppressed that what everybody knows appears a complete distortion of facts. Therefore there are many people who do not like Dr. R.C. Majumdar's conclusions about 1857. Even Dr. Majumdar knew that his write-up went against the current sentiment.

A critical study of the conclusions arrived at by R.C. Majumdar in his book **British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance** and Dr. S.B. Chaudhuri in his work **Theories of the**

Indian Mutiny 1857-1859 has been compared by John C.B. Webster (**Studying History,** Macmillan, 1998). The study is very revealing.

Majumdar presents a picture of the area north of Narmada, which may be taken as more typical than unusual. "It portrays Indian chiefs fighting against one another, some of them befriending the English for securing help against rival chiefs, others helping the British first, then changing or forced to change, their attitude by the unjust suspicion of the latter, brought out in no small measure by the machinations of their Indian enemies, the petty local chiefs only busy with establishing their own authority and enriching themselves by all unscrupulous means, plunder and murder going on all sides.... This hardly fits in with the romantic picture of Jhansi as the centre of a national war of independence. But such was, in brief, the condition of the whole North-Western Provinces...."

If one added to this scenario the fact of communal tension and sepoy outrages against civilians in Bareilly, the reluctance of the Taluqdars of Oudh to commit themselves whole heartedly to the rebel cause until after Canning's proclamation, and the failure of the rebels in their siege of Lucknow as further examples of disunity — the emerging picture becomes bleak indeed. Where Majumdar strikes a most discordant note is the details he writes about Delhi, which relate to chaos and division within the city. Even while

fighting the British the divided loyalties of the Emperor and the Court, their dislike of the sepoys which was reciprocated in full, the divisions and enmity between the sepoys and the people of Delhi, communal tension and the lack of leadership and organisation against the British, all these facts put together constitute a provocative attack, upon the 'first national war of Independence' view.

It is quite significant that the title of the section on 1857 is "**The Mutiny and Revolt of 1857-58**" and the chapters are titled:

1. The Outbreak of the Mutiny 1857
2. The spread of the Mutiny (a region by region description)
3. The Revolt of the People (a general statement and then a region by region description)
4. Restoration of Order
5. Atrocities
6. The Nature of the Outbreak of 1857
7. The Causes of the Outbreak (Mutiny and civilian outbreak rested separately)
8. The Causes of Failure

Now we take a look at S.B. Chaudhuri's work. Taken together, Chaudhuri and Majumdar provide an interesting pair of histories. A comparison of their explanations of the events in Delhi would indicate that Majumdar

considered Delhi to have been the centre of neither people's revolt, a national struggle, nor an organised conspiracy to overthrow British rule, whereas Chauduri considered it to have been all the three. A comparison would look like the following:

Majumdar	Chaudhuri
1. Chaos and division within the city	1. No disagreement
2. Divided loyalties of the Emperor and his Court	2. No disagreement
3. Mutual dislike between Sepoys and the Court	3. No disagreement
4. Enmity between the sepoys and the people of Delhi	4. No disagreement
5. Communal tension	5. Hindu-Muslim unity
6. Lack of leadership and organisation against the British	6. No disagreement
7. Not dealt with behind the revolt in Delhi	7. The political theory

The point at dispute is 'Hindu-Muslim unity'. The evidence is used by the two are different. Majumdar used Jiwanlal's diary supported by a letter of Major General T. Reed and Chunilal's statement during the trial of Bahadur Shah; and,

S.B. Chaudhuri used Keith Young and Charles Ball. The difference in evidences alone does not mark the difference in conclusions but they use Delhi proclamation urging the two communities to unite in common struggle. For one historian this was a mere 'pious wish' and for the other the most trustworthy testament of perfect understanding that prevailed at that time between Hindus and Mahomedans. For Majumdar Jiwanlal's evidence is reliable. But for Chaudhuri it was a "very much selective" choice. Now who will take a decision in this regard?

Before we read the judgement delivered by yet another historian let us see what exactly was Jiwanlal's evidence and who was he. Once again following the line taken by John C.B. Webster I learn that Jiwanlal was using the terms 'Hindus' and 'Mahomedans' in the sense of Indians and therefore what Moulvie Mohammed Said tried to do he failed in his effort. 'Hindu' as a term denotes middle-class Hindu residents of Delhi and Mahommedans "suspected of pro-British sympathies". The reader must realise that there were no two well-defined, highly integrated and or mutually suspicious communities in Delhi in 1857.

Jiwan Lal was himself a Munshi and his diary is a day to day record of events of Delhi during the crucial days of 'War of Independence'. He was close to Durbar and was interested in collecting information about events taking place

outside his own fortified place where he was holed up because of his past links with the British and was generally suspected to be a British spy by others. Until arrested on August 7, he remained in his residence depending upon his informants (whom he names) for all the tidbits they collected. Jiwan Lal was a trained Munshi and knew how to keep daily diaries for his employers. On his own he was free from communal prejudices — his sole interest being, like a true Kayastha — in his job.

One of his entries is as follows:

The date is 20 May 1857.

"Moulvie Mahommed Said demanded an audience, and represented to the King that the Standard of Holy War had been erected for the purpose of inflaming the minds of the Mahommedans against the Hindus. The King answered that such a Jehad was quite impossible, and such an idea an act of extreme folly, for the majority of the Purbeah soldiers was Hindus. Moreover, such an act would create internecine war, and the result would be deplorable. It was fitting that sympathy should exist among all classes. It was pointed out that the Hindus were leaning towards an alliance with the English and had no sympathy with the Mahommedans, and were already holding themselves apart. A deputation of Hindu officers arrived to complain of the war against the Hindus being preached. The King replied "The Holy War

is against the English; I have forbidden it against the Hindus".

Those who doubt the veracity in the content of this representation have a closed mind. They have no idea that when the Muslims are in majority they enforce their will on non-Muslims. They have never hesitated for a second. This is how it is in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and elsewhere. They are willing to take any risk for the propagation of their **deen** and **qaum**. India is suffering the mistakes of its liberal policies. In Kashmir Nehru held back the Indian army when it had the upper hand and in Simla Indira Gandhi showed the same magnanimity and released over a lakh of Pakistani soldiers without bothering to ask Pakistan to lay its hands off Kashmir forever. The Indian 'secularists' see nothing wrong in the decimation of Hindus in our neighbouring countries but continue to raise a non-issue as if Heavens will fall if a single temple was constructed in India. One can see how Indian historians have echoed these political concerns and brought about paradigm changes in historical interpretations. The issue under discussion is whether or not there was 'communal' tension. Whereas Majumdar says there was, Chaudhuri denies its existence. Up to this point the problem is simple — difference in interpretation of facts. One could easily concede the ground that the meaning of nationalism and any commitment to it the way Nation-States expect today did not exist. But the

fact remains that on the slightest pretext Muslims would declare Jihad against non-Muslims and their dislike of someone else/else's faith invites the threat of violence. For all this one could read any news paper daily anywhere in the world for confirmation. But we have here evidence to endorse Jiwan Lal.In the **Annals of the Indian Rebellion** Vol.1 p.163 one Chunni Lal has recorded the same event, and the major characters are also the same. The background of this record is that it constitutes an event of a report sent by one Chunni Lal for a period May 11 to 20,1857 to his English employer.

However, Rajat Kanta Ray in his contribution to a publication by Mushirul Hasan and Narayani Gupta (**Manohar**, 1993) moves the above discussion far beyond the real frame of disagreement, and proposes yet another frame. All this means that the issue has been successfully skirted. Now, skirting real issues is the contemporary signature of a modern intellectual. Here is its example. Ray found that the recurring phrase in 1857 "The Muslims and Musalmans of Hindustan" had several *distinct* implications:

(a) The Hindus and Muslims remain two separate people (qaums) based on two separate creeds; (b)) they are co-sharers of the realm of Hindustan, and as such one people, and two peoples, at one and the same time; (c) there is no question, at this stage, of a single secular national community of Hindustani, nor of being

bonded together, independent of 'deen' and 'dharma', by secular political sentiments alone; (d) what in fact bonds them together is the united struggle for the 'deen' of the Muslims and the 'dharma' of the Hindus; (e) what unites the struggle is the threat posed by the two **qaums** based on **'deen'** and **'dharma'** respectively; (f) what distinguishes them from other 'qaums' beyond the land, even those external qaums that belong to one or the other creed, is the land itself; (g) in the social and cultural perspective, the land is one; (h) "the Hindus and Musalmans of Hindustan is a term taken by the mutineers, in a political sense, to cover the whole population.

In brief, a major problem gets so diluted and muddled that only Mr. Ray would know how to categorise it.

It would be instructive to read what Mahatma Gandhi wrote regarding Hindu-Muslim relation in his **Autobiography** (Navajivan Prakashan, 1997, pp. 325-326): "I had realised early enough in South Africa that there was no genuine friendship between the Hindus and Musalmans. I never missed a single opportunity to remove obstacles in the way of unity. It was not in my nature to placate anyone by adulation, or at the cost of self-respect. But my South African experiences had convinced me that it would be the question of Hindu-Muslim unity that my Ahimsa would be put to the severest test, and that the question presented the widest field for my experiment in Ahimsa. The conviction is still

there. Every moment of my life I realise that God is putting me on trial".

India's historians both the British and the natives have been quite deliberately mischievous. The Hindutva bogey was constructed by a colonising company and nation to undermine the authority of the then ruling Islamic State in the process of preparing ground for the "enlightened, secular" legitimacy of their own rule. Contemporary historians today have reversed the table having elected to declare Islamic minority as being endangered as a species and tradition.

Secularism being touted as the Western monopoly has been severely criticised (*Times of India,* June 18, 1998) by Neera Kuckreja Sohoni. She goes on to cite the example of USA where the logic of affirmative action has resulted in the religious majority becoming the victim of reverse discrimination. This, she asserts, is the experience of 'Hindu' Indians. The way secularism is proclaimed on the floors of legislative assemblies and in the Indian Parliament it appears that the term is now "a pawn in weekly manifestoes and daily press releases of defunct or hoping-to-make-a-comeback political parties?" For ready reference read the speeches delivered in Parliament (April 1999) to bring down Bajpaye government by all'secular' parties. The refrain was 'communal' versus 'secular'.

The other example of what Neera has stated so emphatically can be seen in a paper brought

out by Nehru Memorial Museum and Library by P.C. Upadhhaya, Number XI titled **"The Politics of Indian Secularism: The Practitioners, Defenders and Critics"**. In this relatively lengthy and highly repetitive-styled paper the role of Indian National Congress leadership has been examined since inception vis-a-vis the practice of 'secularism'. His choice of what Gandhi said or practiced is highly selective. According to him Gandhi's adoption of the 'religious tolerance model' for the creation of Indian political unity was utopian and simplistic. It was propagated without any clear-sighted understanding of politics or any design for the creation of the institutional mechanisms of power sharing. Neither did he provide any code for the observation of religious tolerance, other than that of a personal example. In other words he lacked 'political wisdom'. The unintended result of Gandhism has been promotion of 'peaceful communalism'. Gandhi may have declared Hinduism 'secular', pluralistic and democratic but its practice by him as well as his followers has been very different.

Ashis Nandy claims that "it is from non-modern India, from the traditions and principles of religious tolerance encoded in everyday life associated with different faiths of India, that one will have to seek clues to the renewal of Indian political culture". According to Nandy, "The traditional ways of life have over the centuries developed internal principles of tolerance and

these principles must play a part in contemporary politics". He goes on to the extent of holding the view that statecraft in India may have to learn something from Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism and not the other way round. The secret of success lies in practice and not in defining how can Constitution teach secularism" *(Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol. XIII, No. 2, 1988).

P.C. Upadhyaya maintains that "Secularism, like pluralism, has a distinct time, space and historicity of its own. Thus the appellation of positive qualifications such as 'secular', 'plural', 'democratic' and 'tolerant' to Hinduism has neither any historical consistency nor any logical or conceptual accuracy". Thereafter he goes on to contest the characterisation of Hinduism as 'plural', 'secular' and 'democratic' by its very nature. He supports his arguments by stating some six points. They are : 'Pluralism' as a body of thought was a political programme of action for the advanced democracies of West. In Hinduism pluralism could at best be regarded as neutral and not a positive concept or practice.

One need hardly point out that racism in Great Britain or USA may not, be as rampant as elsewhere but presence of *'Skin heads'* or *'White Wolves'* in UK and *'Ku Klux Klan'* in the USA do not support Upadhyaya. His thesis is further demolished in Australia where 'One Nation Party' has gathered more than twenty percent electorate. He cites Sudipta Kaviraj

("Political Culture in Independent India: An Anti-Romantic View in Teaching Politics", Vol. VII, No. 1-2, 1989). "It (Indian/Hindu) is pluralism which represents a powerless intolerance. Several contiguous and mutually independent autocracies do not represent a democratic culture".

This is a question of how one wishes to perceive — a half-empty glass or half-full — both being partial truths. Muslims and Hindu live as contiguous and mutually independent social systems.

The philosophies of pluralism, democracy and secularism are based on the ideological ethics of social integration and the freedom of an individual within the capitalist and socialist society. But the variety and diversity in Hindu social life is rather the product of the ideology of social discrimination based on the compartmentalize ethics of tribe-like fragmentation. Thus the sources of disintegration in Hindu social life exist at various levels of vertical and horizontal hierarchy of discrimination, encouraged above all by the inequalitarianism inherent in the theoretical and practical essence of the caste system and its prejudices.

If we go by the contemporary reality of post-Mandalisation, Hindu society should match Upadhyaya's description. Neither our social history nor the scriptures would support its validity or else there would not have been

numerous saints and venerated poets from within the so-called lower caste orders — such as Kabir, Raidas, Valmiki etc. Indeed, the most ancient of Hindu epics was written by Valmiki and his description of 'social order' hardly, if at all, supports Mr. Upadhyaya. Even Manu talks of normal and contingent periods of time and codifies behaviour, which may not endorse Upadhyaya.

4) The notion of equality (legal and economic) is an inherent principle of pluralism and democracy in capitalist and socialist systems. The caste status of a Hindu (which is inherently unequal) stands legitimised by Karma (Duty) philosophy.

Perhaps Upadhyaya should have consulted a lexicon to find out that Karma is also one's fate.

Not only does an individual's caste assign him a role in society as a result of which one's status stands defined but Hindus believe that there are conditions under which a caste does not determine everything. For instance, according to Manu a behaviour could also earn one a status and so can the circumstances. One is not merely 'fated' to lead a life of penury but through one's effort (karma) one could rise in status and comfort. Therefore in Sanskrit there are two distinctly different terms — 'Bhagya' (Fate) and Prarabdh (Destiny). One could change one's fate through one's effort i.e. Karma but not the

'Prarabdh' or Destiny. This distinction holds the real key to one's behaviour and conduct.

Tolerance in a plural society/polity is based on the recognition of an opposition as a matter of democratic temper. When we study the nature of Hindu social organisations in this context we find that the existence of various communities in India was the by-product of the practical need of social discrimination in favour of India's dominant classes (Brahmins and Kshatriyas in particular) who themselves provided the religious scheme for legitimising a discriminatory social order.

True, in India Hindus have a discriminatory social order but has not Islam or Christianity in India too have the Dalits among them? Perhaps Upadhyaya should read newspapers as well, to note that this class exists in the much publicised 'egalitarian' religions too. M.N. Srinivas (*Times of India*, 29 April 1999) cites from **The Plight of Christian Dalits: A South Indian Case Study** by Godwin Shiri "Because of the miserable, nay beggarly, situation into which they are being pushed, they are forced to adopt a dual identity — a Hindu identity for the sake of getting state support which is vital for their survival, and a Christian identity because of their faint hope of acquiring a social status. In fact they are people 'caught' in a triangle of sorts, a socially oppressive society, a communally discriminating state and a Church which, though least concerned about their plight, is often

moralistic in the demands it makes on them". However, caste in India has never been static. In recent times the case of Shivaji Maharaj requires an indepth study. All rulers whether local, tribals or foreigners became or earned Kshatriya status. The Maratha rulers are today accepted as full blue-blooded Kshatriyas. Nehru family's caste/religious structure also deserves a close look. Does Mr. Upadhyaya know anything about Satyakama Jabal? Hindu caste system was always flexible and adjustable.

Outstanding talent in all societies—be they closed or semi-closed transcends a fixed social or intellectual order. **Static societies are dead societies.** Hindu society does not fall within that category.

6) The 'secular' traditions of Hinduism are demonstrated by pointing to the lack of one centre of authority in it, which it is argued, produced a plural polytheistic tradition based on tolerance. On this basis Hinduism as distinct from other religions is anti-fundamentalist. Upadhyaya cites Girilal Jain who claimed Hinduism possessed an "oceanic range, which cannot be enclosed in a narrow doctrine", only to say that this is a romantic view of Hinduism and is twice removed from Reality. Sudipta Kaviraj is cited because he upholds the view that "Democratic tolerance is not based on political ineffectiveness. When a case is made for political autonomy to individuals or groups, its premise is not that the central government is unable to

give away what you never had in the first place".

The RSS, BJP and VHP etc. try to project, says Upadhyaya, Pan-Hindu political unity by trying to create a political cultural centre of Hinduism and its authority in the Indian nation-state. Romila Thapar is cited because she says "In India we are now seeking legitimacy from the past in attempts to build institutions, which would be conducive to the powers of a Church, should there have been a Church in India. For instance, by insisting on the historical existence of a Hindu community, or other communities defined solely by an overarching religious identity, we endorse the idea of an ecclesiastical infrastructure even where it did not exist before. The idea that the religious community was a basic identity of Indian society was fostered in the nineteenth century". (**Mainstream**, January 28, 1989).

When these lines were written there was no BJP government at the centre. In 1999 when it is in place, one should wait before a judgement could be delivered. However, to say that Hindu society acquired the trappings of being a religious community is of a 19th century lineage is not correct. This would put the efforts of Rajputs and the Jats during Muslim rule to uphold the basic tenets of Hinduism totally negated.

We should not overlook the fact that 'secular' traditions have hardly ever been evident in the so-called European societies. The persecution

of Roman Catholics, Jews and the problem of Ulster in Ireland barely supports the view that liberal/plural traditions are their monopoly. What is happening in Croatia/Bosnia is also hardly supportive of Romila Thapar's view. Indeed, what characterises American society is its ethnic intolerance and the negation of a pluralistic political order; or else, how do they explain McCarthyism in their midst and their consistent liking for totalitarian/fundamentalist nations like China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia etc. In fact Upadhyaya and his preferences would need modifications after a bit of patient, cool thinking.

The origin of Hindu consciousness could be easily traced to the reformist movements within that community. If the early reformists eventually acquired distinctly different religious identities with their own philosophical systems such as Buddhism and Jainism does not take away the truth that in their effort to reform and simplify early ritualism as a form of religious practice the stranglehold of Brahmanism had become too defined for social comfort. It could be argued that the earliest forms of what we call Hinduism today had acquired several types of codes of conduct and social behaviour. Human beings seldom like regimentation. I view that even the contemporary concept of 'secularism' is an effort to free an individual, group or society from too rigid a definitional counter. The saint poets of India represented yet another form of reform

movements therefore not unlike the Buddhists and the Jains they too eventually developed and grew into their 'mathas' (Churches) with their followers. The third wave of reformists took birth in the early parts of the nineteenth century. The Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Dev Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission and the Aurobindoites are in their essence efforts to give the Hindu masses which consisted of all classes and castes a chance to see themselves afresh with the help of an alternative system. As always only a few could appreciate these efforts and joined movements of their choice. By its very nature masses have rarely been comfortable with intellectual discourses. What probably they need for their simple living requirements is a base for survival. It is possible today to appreciate why the ritualistic form of any religious system has a greater appeal than its ideological or philosophical base. One of the reasons why these reform movements remained confined to a handful of people and never really acquired any mass following is perhaps because that while an ideology could be understood if one had freetime with education as a necessary pre-condition, for a ritual one needs only to follow one's instinct to imitate a behaviour.

The question of majority politics arose only after the arrival of the British in India because in the presence of dominant Islamic rule and few Hindu princely fiefdoms the only identity one could have was either of a subject or of a hegemonic overlord. It is absurd to imagine, let

alone argue, that a majoritarianian bias or a consciousness was even possible before 19th century. India had witnessed mass conversions for economic, political and social communications reasons earlier too but this time yet another religion had posed a threat not only to Hindus but also to Muslims. For the sake of entry to a ruling class and for other similar reasons Hindus were not quite unwilling to convert but the Muslims as a dominant religious community with a highly vocal and organised priestly class put up a resistance on their own. Probably because of this social tension and political upheaval a Hindu consciousness took birth and for the first time Hindus noticed that the mighty Muslims had also been reduced to their own social, economical and political levels. Although no love was ever lost between the two communities despite Sufism and the Hindu Saint poets, in their loss of power the Muslims needed allies even if they came from their erstwhile subject (enemy) people.

It is against this background one should see Hindu behaviour and their desire to gain back their (historically remote) dominant position. The numbers came in handy. In modern day politics it is the numbers that matter and Hindus have this advantage. For once they learnt to bring home the message. To condemn them for majoritarian politics is to overlook lessons from history. V.S. Naipaul talks of this phenomenon in his book **The Wounded Civilization.**

For our modern day historians all their analyses and paradigms have Western inspiration. It is no surprise then that they hardly ever see the ground reality. Muslims have inherited a non-compromising anti-infidel attitude and it is not possible to accommodate even a bit on their religious ground. One should remember a Muslim has to have complete faith in Hazarat Mohammad, his sayings (the Hadith) and the Holy Koran. No matter what others may say any deviation from the norm makes him a kafir, a non-Muslim. The Hindu secularists sincerely believe that there can exist a mythical character called a 'liberal' Muslim. This hope will never be fulfilled. In their mistaken belief they compare a 'secular' Hindu with a 'secular' Muslim — while the former could be a real living being but the latter is a myth.

A Muslim married to a Hindu girl does not become 'secular'/ 'liberal' because the girl has already been converted to Islam and may carry two names: one for others and the other for her husband.

An orthodox Sunni does not regard even a Shia a Muslim what to say of Ahmadias, Bohras, and hundreds of the like. For a Muslim leader when Hindus are killed in Kashmir it does not make news but he is agitated over a statement given by Bal Thackerey. For a Muslim a demolished structure could earn the status of Shahadat — one had learnt once that only humans could be shahid (martyrs)! and yet the

birthplaces of Ram and Krishna occupied by their structures (mosques) is a religious grace (Sabab). What are the secularists trying to say in this regard? The communalist Hindus are creating problems because they are unwilling to live in eternal disgrace even after having earned their Independence after 850 years and two partitions later. Look at the cheek of the Hindu jingoists who claim that they can also possess a sense of honour. How dare they?

In fact what we should see is that along with the birth of reformist movements a Hindu consciousness took shape. They desired their religion to acquire such characteristics so as to save them from an unfavourable comparison with the Western religion, which appeared ever so well organised, civilised and regulated. The fact that in the face of the onslaught of Islam, Hindus had rarely felt inferior and could hold their own when a powerful Hindu prince gave them proper protection. Against the Westerners for once they lacked the courage to face up to a new reality in which the real rulers lived in distant lands and their minions governed an empire. India had not seen all this even under the Great Mughals. The Indians were now matching their wits against the representatives of an Emperor who made no distinction between the erstwhile rulers and their subjects. In a way this gave Hindus a feeling that they too could have a different, may be a distinguished, identity if they learnt newer skills of speech and 'cultured' conduct. This precisely

is the root cause of our contemporary Hindu-Muslim tension. Muslims never reconciled to the fact that they may one day be governed by the majority community. From day one when the last of the Mughal emperors had faded into the oblivion Muslims in the sub-continent have been swaying from one extreme to the other. They have not outlived the 'glorious' past of their 'thousand' years rule over the infidels and have also not given up the hope that one day they will reconquer the lost territories. The question of Kashmir is therefore not a simple territorial dispute which could one day be resolved. Kashmir symbolises the hope that one day the Green Flag with a moon and star will again flutter over this land of infidels who have no right or claim to equality with their former Great Rulers. Whether this is a dream or a reality only the future will tell. The five bombs which Pakistan some how acquired and exploded are all demonstrations of the fact that sizes of nations do not matter in history nor are their social and economic progress any indications of their superiority. After all, did not a very small country like England which had neither a highly developed educational system nor democracy could conquer the seven seas where the Sun did not set and has not a highly technologically developed and large country like the USA failed to subdue, let alone conquer, a small nation like Vietnam? History keeps on throwing up examples of all varieties and can sustain any dream or

help build images of myriads of depression. Muslims have a hope, they have pride and for all this they think they have the blessings of Allah. In fact they need no 'left' parties in India or the Indian National Congress or Janata Dals to bolster up their spirits. They know what they are doing. The Kesaris of today will soon be forgotten but what will remain is the eternal glory of the moment, which only God can grant.

For a Hindu it is extremely difficult to understand a Muslim's psyche. Down the history from the day when Prithviraj Chauhan was vanquished by the conquering hordes of Islam, and when twice the Government of India had the chance to settle the Kashmir issue Hindu 'liberality', 'openness', 'forgiveness' etc. have proved to be their terribly expensive and humiliating virtues. One must not forget that History is a good teacher but those who learn nothing from her do so at their own peril. What the West has learnt over a period of time Americans will learn one day and probably the Hindus never. An introvert, cowardly and highly selfish individual or group only learns to rationalise the inevitable consequences of its misadventures. No one can excel a Hindu in this art of self-deception and rationalising acumen. They do not see that even a simple game of cricket can acquire the stature of 'jihad' for a Muslim and a victory in a match the equivalent of Islamic conquest over the infidels. Be that a match in any game or sport between India and

Pakistan, or between Iran and USA the feelings are the same. In the case of Muslims their religion lends a big support and a success of any type, in any branch of human activity are tantamount to the personal blessings of the Almighty. How can a Hindu match this morale boosting Faith who in most cases do not know who governs this Universe or controls human Destiny?

In India secularism is an undefined concept and its practice is unmatched in confusion worst confounded. For a few leftists there is at least some clarity of vision and some sense in what they preach or do. It is another matter that they do not wish to accept that Muslim adherents of Marxism are a classical example of un-Islamic pretensions. They are rejects or misfits in their own system and have found leftism a unique highway for intellectual and social acceptance. In this way they have found a forum through which they may write, speak, ridicule or humiliate Hindu philosophy, practices or history. They have gradually over a period of time, built up a coterie of admirers for their most 'secular' practices and ideology in the higher echelons of Indian polity and society. It is their admirers who have set unmatched examples of communal behaviour. Mr. V.P. Singh whose secularism needed the confirmation of an Imam of Delhi and his party the nominations of several Muslim leaders who have no word of sympathy for any other community is an example of the practice,

and ideology of secularism. With regard to the Indian National Congress one need hardly write anything to establish their most partisan behaviour and confused ideology. Rajiv Gandhi though not a Hindu himself laid the foundations of Ram Mandir at Ayodhya and his party which was then in power saw the demolition of a mosque-like structure, today is seen as the most fanatic defender of 'secularism'. What all the Hindu organisations with all their militancy could not achieve, a secular party like the INC accomplished it in no time. Instead of accepting the eternal gratitude of Hindus for freeing the birthplace of Ram (howsoever mythological the belief may be) from a humiliating occupancy the INC is now shying away from its due for reasons best known to it.

Also let us not forget that Muslim intelligentsia roundly castigated the icon of 'secularism' (viz. Gandhiji) which the INC so proudly carries with it everywhere and everytime was a practising Hindu and who for this was called names in his lifetime. It is no secret that because of Gandhiji the Indian National Congress was called a 'Hindu' party — even when he had clearly written, "Friends get confused when I say I am a Sanatanist Hindu and they fail to find in me what they associate with a man usually labelled as such.... Mine is a broad faith, which does not oppose Christians... not even the most fanatical Musalman. It is a faith based on the broadest possible toleration". What Gandhiji wrote only a

Hindu could write because any accommodation of the type he claims he was making is alien to Islam or Christianity. For him a religious basis of politics meant something unheard of except in the Marxists' circles. "Here religion does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in the ordered moral government of the Universe.... This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc. — harmonises them and gives them reality." Therefore although I have personally great respect for the great man, he stands thrown overboard by the Islamic laws of Pakistan and Bangladesh where all other religions except Islam are heretic in practice and faith.

Partition in India seems to be a big issue. Different brands of intellectuals keep on giving reasons for the partition as if the question of partition has been raised in India for the first time and as if Islam knows to live with others in peace. The countries that face partition because of Islam or have already gone through it are spread across the continents where formal partition has not taken place, informal partition exists already. One of the reasons why China supports Pakistan is that it is mortally afraid of its own Muslim minorities aligning with the fundamentalist outfits of Pakistan and not so much because China is against India. The export of terrorism is an alternative business anywhere but more so in a nation like Pakistan which has seen its advantages. No American sanction could make Pakistan poor so long as the

essential character of Islam (Holy wars or Jehads) sell better than neutron bombs. All religions thrive on ignorance and poverty but rarely can a religion sell itself in exchange for goods and services.

For me the issue of partition of India is as rotten as a carcass — it would have taken place sooner or later. Even the Pakhtoons and the Frontier Gandhi supported Pakistan when the question arose of majority rule in India. Recent studies conducted by foreigners are eye opening for those who continue to live in cuckoo's land. For me therefore whether it is E.M.S. Namboodiripad writing: "The seeds of Hindu Rashtra were sown by those who, in the name of fighting Islamic communalism, adopted the Hindu version of 'two nation' theory", or because it is pointed out since the Muslims had aligned themselves with British interests "Hindu majority politics acquired the status of the sole nationalist force", is immaterial.

I may also like to ask the secularist one more question. In which Islamic/Muslim dominated countries are minorities safe? and, where do they find Islamic democracies functional? Islam does not accept pluralistic societies and neither does it like democracy. The Taliban model is admired in Algiers, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and in number of other countries. Perhaps in India our intellectuals have not heard of these distant lands and their preferences. It is possible they know nothing about the location of Coimbatore.

Nearer home the Indian National Congress leadership does not seem to have read the history of their own organisation closely as well. Or else, they would have known that in the best of the days when it was the sole popular party the attendance in their annual gatherings was a fraction of Muslim leadership (7.1 per cent) and there were barely 26 Muslim seats out of 492 in 1937. Not many know today that Muslims were allowed dual membership both of Muslim League and the Congress and even the venue for both could be the same until a Resolution officially banned it (1938). In October 1937 in a Bijnor bye-election "the Congress candidate pursued his campaign under green flag similar to that of Muslim League" (**Contemporary Hindsights**, OUP, 1988, p. 200).

One need hardly go on in this vein to establish what is common knowledge. The INC has hardly any credentials to talk on a subject like secularism with which it has never had even a distant acquaintance, let alone familiarity.

Other than the left parties in India none has either understood or practised 'secularism', but their whole outlook and the base is regional or local. They lack mass following. Therefore their appeal is limited in scope.

I see a good deal of merit in what Rajni Kothari says, "What sets India apart from other federal systems is that in our case, society itself is federal and therefore federalism in the political

sphere has to be seen as no more than a reflection of its basic nature". (*Seminar*, May 1989, (357) p. 14).

Because of the inherent nature of Hindu/ Indian society federalism and democracy would be the only acceptable form of polity. Hindu society could not be made fundamentalist therefore by the same token of logic it can never become authoritarian, anti-pluralistic, rigid (as opposed to 'liberal') and homogenous. Therefore to equate a Hindu system with Fascism is as far removed from Reality as Earth is from a Blackhole.

I do not think India needs to borrow either the definition or the model of a secular nation-state from the West. Because of their affluence people are misled into believing that the West has no history of either religious conflicts, religious persecution of people or demand for separate states within a single nation-state. I have no wish to write a book on contemporary European history to give very recent examples of each of the points I have raised. Unless Indians love to self-immolate themselves over a non-issue they should better concentrate on economic progress, healthy democracy and societal equity and education and let other things take care of themselves.

Ravinder Kumar (*Times of India*, June 30, 1998) being a typical representative of the so-called anti-fascistic order is highly alarmed at

the assertion "that the dominant culture of India was being shaped exclusively by the overarching vision of Hinduism". He goes on to say that this view "invalidates one of the sacred principles of the Indian Constitution". Though a historian by profession Ravinder Kumar seems to forget that the Indian Constitution itself is the product of the tolerant, liberal, anti-fascist traditions and nature of the Hindu society. The fact that unlike Christianity or Islam Hinduism allows the flowering of a pluralistic base/order does indeed validate the very basis of Indian Constitution or else in the aftermath of communal bloodbath India too would have opted for a theocratic state.

Religion does have a potent influence on its believers. This is what makes a Hindu so very different from a Muslim. In either Pakistan or Bangladesh one would be hard put to find a handful of Muslim intellectuals who could write as openly against their own co-religionists as Ravinder Kumar or members of his tribe can. What greater proof of tolerance, accommodation and brotherhood of religions does he demand? People like him create their own enemies in imagination and then like Sancho Panza go about killing them. They have no time or patience to look at the plight of Salman Rushdie or Taslima Nasreen. Without ever bothering to examine the reasons that make a Muslim so uncompromising they target against those who have no history of bigotry.

The politicization of Babari structure issue is a clear example of who is exploiting whom and for what. Even if the Muslims were to reconcile to the construction of Ram Mandir, the likes of Ravinder Kumar shall not permit it let alone the great Yadava leaders who cannot come in power without inciting communal frenzy.

The secularists expect from all others who disagree with their views of reality a selective amnesia of how in the name of religion Pakistan and Bangladesh have cleansed themselves ethnically; they feel for Muslims in India about their rights to free expression and pursuit of faith but fail to find voice for what is being done in Kashmir of Sheikh Abdullah to Hindu Pandits; they see everything wrong in Advani and Bal Thackerey but bend forward in awkward postures fawning in front of a Shahi (?) Imam and a Syed Shahabuddin; they see nothing wrong with 'minority' fanaticism but are intolerant of Hindu rituals. Indeed, what they want is a little praise for their liberal views and broadmindedness even if in their utter ignorance they are being more faithful to their enemies across the border than to their own country which provides them with a platform and a gullible audience ready to commit harakari at their behest. They see no contradictions in their historical analyses and perceive nothing wrong in subverting truth. They have not heard of V.S. Naipaul who records why *India* is a *Wounded Civilization*, and that, as already stated, earlier

Islam is essentially an Arab religion and an Arab monopoly who are unwilling to grant equal status to the converts elsewhere. They are not aware that Islam everywhere has been an instrument of protest — the lower castes protesting against the upper castes in India; the blacks raising their Islamic slogans against White Christians in USA and elsewhere etc.

No one would want that Islam changes its colour and tones down its voice or would it ever be willing to oblige anyone on those lines and why must it? But then what is the harm — if people know that by its nature it is intolerant of others and fundamentally violent. The idea is not to oppose Islam but be ready instead, of the inherent potential threats that such a company always carries within itself.

The problem one faces is not because there are dangers in ignorance but because the threat to one's survival does not always come from one's known enemies but from the unsuspected designs of well-wishers who are ready to brandish sharp-edged large knives in the dark with the intentions of killing only to please someone who never learnt to feel obliged for anything.

Under these circumstances the survival of Hinduism deserves a closer look. The Muslims are apprehensive of the consequences of their own misdeeds in Pakistan but they should feel assured that they have in fact nothing to fear from anyone in India except these secularists.

CHAPTER - 4

HINDUISM IN MODERN INDIA

In the past couple of years Hindus and Hinduism have come to be identified with a political party — derisively called the Sangh Parivar or the Saffron Brigade by the present-day secularists. The way crusades on their citadels are being mounted would make anybody sit up and look for the signs of the impending national doom. I find their logic skewed and reasoning limited. The vehemence of this launch is decidedly more vigorous by practising historians who have taken upon themselves to remove cobwebs created and left behind by the demolishers of Babri Masjid. M.V. Sobhana (*Times of India*, 21 July 1998) presents the case of the secularists thus: "Who decides that the advocates of a Ram Temple speak for the Hindu? There is tremendous ambiguity in the Hindu tradition and there are a variety of Hindu practices. It seems today that all this is being conflated to the desire and will of the Sangh Parivar which is seeking to whip up the sentiments of the Hindu community all over the country to just one agenda — the redefining of Indian identity as Hindutva through mobilisation around the temple". And according to him while "the secular forces attempt to cement the diverse complex social fabric that is India together, the latter fractures it and creates chasms".

The same issue of the daily carried a write-up by Gurucharan Das **"Why Indians Make Poor Team Players"** which makes a detailed analysis of why Indians have never united

against a threat to their national survival down the ages. Even the wars that Indians have won a Harvard Professor, Steve Rossen noted, "The only justifiable conclusion is that in 1965 the Indian Army displayed low levels of cohesion, which led to their early collapse in battle...." What makes Indians so non-cohesive is a subject worth deep study. If the psychologists have traced the reasons behind this phenomenon to a lack of sons' identification with their fathers and a sociologist traces the roots of mutual distrust to the caste-based social structure — the fact remains that Indians lack social purpose and cohesive ideology. But then it is neither here nor there. On July 17 Laloo Yadav had declared in Parliament that what he could do is not possible to predict if Muslim women do not have a separate quota in the 33% which Parliament wanted to reserve for women. And the latter is an ex-CM of Bihar.

What India would do or not do is definitely decided by those who are pro or anti-Muslim preferences. For the secularists the concern for Muslims symbolises modernity, broadmindedness and cohesion and the rest the very opposite of what they hold dear to their heart.

Typically illustrative is the way Muslims perceive the non-Muslim aspirations. *Times of India* (14 July 1998) carries a paper by one Sultan Shahin titled **"Gift away the Babri Site: expose the hidden agenda"**. I find the word 'Gift' particularly interesting. One cannot gift

away something, which does not belong to the one who would like to gift the same away. A dacoit or a criminal can give something back to which he had no right to possess. Mr. Shahin must prove first his entitlement or ownership before he could declare that 'gifting away' is a legal possibility. Also, he has not inquired whether anyone is agreeable to accept his 'gift'.

In her rejoinder (July 22, 1998) Neera (the original initiator of the debate) calls Shahin's letter 'condescending' and says he has missed the real issue. The point she wanted to state was, "as citizens of a secular country we should all be able to revisit history to reclaim a tradition (in this case Ram's birthplace) as a non-denominational national and not a Hindu, heritage". One is tempted to advise Neera to remember that 'a secularist' does not visit or revisit history because secularism denies the very existence of Ram and holds that Hindus have no worthwhile verifiable history of any of their deities. Hence they have no claim of any sort in this regard.

Against this background one must define Hindu identity and the reasons for its survival.

The early history of India has undergone numerous changes both in its content and the way facts have been presented. Therefore there is every possibility some more are on their way in the next couple of decades. For instance, I have with me a textbook meant for graduate

students written in the year 1873 by John Clarke Marshman running into 563 pages printed in 8 point in most parts and in 6 point it has a large index. In brief it is quite a book. For Marshman ancient India did not require more than 17 pages and of that too the Epics eight pages and Lord Buddha and his great Dhamma six pages and the history of Deccan covering the Dravidians, Cholas and Pandyas, Marathas and the Oriyas just three pages. Around 100 pages are devoted to the history of Islam and its rule and the rulers and the rest is all about British ascendancy and power until 1870 in more than 450 pages. Such was the level of information about India then. Now that we know more about it the approaches to perceiving Reality vary to such an extent that even diametrically opposite views could be defended without much ado.

This prefatorial note was necessary to remind 'the secularists' that they alone are not the custodians of either facts or their representation. In India luckily it is still possible to speak the truth, as one perceives it.

Thanks to Wheeler and co. and professors A.L. Basham and Percieval Spear we stand much better informed about India and her people than we ever were. Having stated the fact that Indian history has come of age in stages spread over a period of time and that the final word has not been spoken as yet although we may state what is commonly agreed to be the truth.

India, as we knew it before 1947, had a well-demarcated territory. The concept of Bharat-Varsha emerged almost around the beginning of the Christian era. This information comes primarily from non-dharmasastra texts such as the Epics, the Puranas, the Brahatsamhita and the Amarkosha etc. The ultimate picture that emerges is of an interactive society between different areas of habitation. Different areas that today are known as Pakistan, India and Bangladesh comprised Brahmasidesa, Madhyadesh, and Mlecchadesh etc. where both Aryas and the 'impure' lived together and interacted. What is most striking about the early Indians is the fact that they kept their cultural boundaries open which means they had shifting political boundaries where social taboos could be ignored easily. In other words, Indian society evolved as a result of constant social interaction and political encouragement.

A good deal of what Hindus generally believe could be traced back to our non-historic past and this is commonly believed to be ascribable to the resilience of Hinduism and to the Hindu psyche which ensured continuity of their beliefs and practices. It depends on us whether or not to feel proud of our heritage. As against those religions, which are, God-based Hindus have had a man-based approach to Divinity. Consequently there is not only a multiplicity of Gods and their distinctly different sets of followers with their Divine books and prescriptions; gods themselves

suffer from the same or identical weaknesses as their followers. If they (gods) are easy to please, they are not difficult to be ignored, conquered, humiliated etc. even by ordinary mortals. This Man-God relationship in Hinduism is so strangely peculiar that the followers of God-based religions find it extremely difficult to follow. We should not forget that this explains to a large extent the cultural diversity and its acceptance even as the continuity of our most ancient traditions with minor modifications is explainable.

Change being the Law of Nature, Hindus have changed over a period of time and so have many things associated with their beliefs and practices. To deny this would be to deny a social and eternal reality.

Almost everyone knows and says that Hinduism has shown unique resilience and in that lies the reason for its survival. The resilience itself is the byproduct of its inexhaustible ability to assimilate what comes as a challenge. In fact the numerous contradictions one perceives in its practices have arisen and remained alive only because it never hesitated to accept the reality. The reality is that one cannot live in isolation, one has to interact and survive variations in human behaviour. This is what explains why Hinduism could never become exclusivist or regimented. It never accepted any central authority and no single world-view. Even the Dharmashastras acknowledged that there are normal times and

exigencies when normalcy is impossible to retain. Both are therefore acceptable.

When one worships God through an image or regards Him formless like the Advaitas both find their followers in abundance. Even those who have no faith in either are equally welcome. Since this position is contrary to the majority of world religions it is necessary to explain the reasons behind this phenomenon.

It is acknowledged on all hands that the term Hindu is of medieval coinage and has geographical antecedents. The old name of India is Bharat. The root of the letter Bh in Sanskrit is light, therefore it was meant to denote the Enlightened land. Bha as in Abha, Vibha or Pratibha is the root for light. Translated into English the word Bharat means the land of light and enlightenment.

One must not forget that Hinduism being what it is — is an evolving, changing, assimilating practice and concept which reflects numerous features of adivasi thoughts and practices. One finds a striking similarity between the concept of animism and of the Omnipresent Divine Being. The entire advaita philosophy ceases to be esoteric when one views it from this point of view.

Historians differ on the dates as well as the fact that Aryans came from outside but the truth is that the concept of Arya or non-Arya is pretty ancient. There are theories regarding who were

Anaryas or the dasyus but one thing is certain that ancient people were more mobile than what their descendants are today. Therefore not only in their mutual acceptance of each other's populace as well as practices one finds a great degree of oneness and hospitality but there are evidences to substantiate the assertion the Aryans gave pride of place to their various forms of social organisations and family arrangements. The fact India has till this day both matriarchy as well as patriarchy is proof enough of this openness and accommodation. I strongly resent the view, which declares Hindus fascists. The people of India have never believed or attempted to declare that only one way of life or a uniformity of practice was either desirable or permissible. This alone should be enough to endorse the view that Hinduism in its essence is a rich conceptual articulation of Adivasi thought.

The present-day Hindu-Muslim riots/dissensions should not make us accept the untruth that Hinduism has ceased to be accommodating and become intolerant of others. In fact this is a socio-political reaction to a highly hegemonic, intolerant and cohesive God-based religious community who threaten not merely the social fabric but the very survival of an 'open' society. The politico-religious rivalry cannot be used as a stick to beat the community, which has come to acquire its rightful position after a gap of around a millennium or more. The betrayers of the community cannot be allowed

the glory to don the mantle of national leadership and power and that too for their own skewed reasoning and distorted vision of society. It is more than a coincidence that their irrationality is matched by their ignorance of both history and culture of India.

An anthropologist (Professor Baidyanath Saraswati) had once defined Hinduism "as an ever-growing religion federating those faiths of inalienable worth whose origin it is possible to trace in the continual process of evolution and accretion in the collective ideas of the Vedic Risis well-marked into the threefold phases of Karma, Jnana and Bhakti, whose adherents are permitted to enter into a sacred shrine commonly known as Hindu temple and whose propounders are intrinsically connected with one another through Guru-Shishya-Parampara of direct or indirect order but none granted absolute authority on guiding the unknowable whole truth." But this was in 1970 and since then he has himself come to realise that Hinduism as a federation of faith is breaking because the modernists have lost sense of history and the secularists have denied the truth-value of the Hindu temples. The threats to Hinduism have started to appear quite effective with the mythological propaganda that Sikhism is not part of Hinduism or Rama Krishna Mission has a separate legal existence. Additionally, god-men have their own ways of destroying Hinduism. Their remythicizing or modernisation,

of Hinduism is impervious to critical analysis but international clientele hallows it. More money from foreign shores had injected poison into the very roots, which defined Hinduism once.

As already stated earlier that the Christian or Islamic criteria of identifying a religious group on the basis of its founder and ecclesiastical organisation do not hold good for classifying India' indigenous faith. Its dynamism and continuity could easily be established by examining the historical antecedents of the evolution of Hindu society. If only its enemies had taken the trouble of appreciating the vitality and the elan which characterised this society much of their opposition and dislike for the term 'Hindu' would have disappeared.

The secularists who accuse anyone who dares to defend a Hindu, his faith or beliefs as some one trying to homogenise the country and being opposed to the pluralistic character of Indian society are ignorant of Indian history. It is interesting to observe that these logicians are ignorant about their own shortcomings and refuse to acknowledge the fact that they could ever go wrong. They have their most convenient icons and if somehow some one differed with them on any ground he joins the class of "small men at home" (*Times of India,* 10 August 1998). For many it has always been hard to justify Mahatma Gandhi as a true secularist. In any case his views never convinced Muslim leaders that he was one such neutral person. All his actions

reeked of Hindu practices, rituals and symbols. These were the allegations against him during his own life time and while every one has a right to speak on and about Godse, no one is willing to listen to Godse himself for the crime he perpetrated. One wonders who exactly is 'small' — the one who enters into a dialogue of the deaf or the one against whom a cruel verdict is delivered even without a hearing? We cannot accuse Indian leadership for their antics of vote capturing but we surely expect Supreme Court Judges to listen to the both sides of the case. In the opinion of Dilip Padganonkar (*Times of India*, 11 August 1998) someone should ask Justice Srikrishna "why he devoted such niggardly space in his report to the serial blasts or why he did not get the Urdu newspapers thoroughly examined to find out whether they contained inflammatory material" would surely appreciate the fact that our judiciary too is nearly as impartial as are our political rulers.

Muslims constitute the soft belly of Indian polity and for their 'alleged' protection they play-act numerous roles. They forget that Hindus have no home other than India; they have no Church to keep them flocked together; they have no militant organizations to fight for their interest, there is no Saudi Arabia, Pakistan or the USA to back up militancy in India to protect Hindu civilians and there are no Hindu-Talibans to conquer territories for religious gains and Hinduism is definitely not a proselytising religion.

Those who criticise Hindus for their religious fundamentalism and call their political philosophy fascist are innocent of history and love to cite only those events or texts which support their viewpoint and advance their own case.

There are several myths around which India's history revolves. Although it is a highly contentious issue it is commonly believed Mohan-Jo-Daro and Harappa represent India's earliest influx of population giving rise to a civilization originating around 2500 BC The skeletal remains of this period suggest the presence of Proto-Australoid, Mediterranean, Alpine, and Mongoloid racial elements. Besides pottery, ornaments, several alloys and precious stones this civilization bequeathed India her worship of Shiva and the Lingam and veneration for Mother Goddess.

The Aryans with their highly organised/articulated varna-vyavastha were later day arrivals but they started the process of Aryanization — which to say the least has neither been complete nor easy. The Rig-Veda describes the battle of Ten Kings in which the Indo-Aryan King Sudasa fought in the Indo-Gangetic plains. Soon after the Indo-Aryans were seen to be gradually emerging from pastoralism to an agricultural economy. Their movement eastwards forced the locals to adopt a few elements of their culture. Thus began a process of partial absorption of Aryan culture.

The fact that this was no easy process can be seen in the fact that numerous Indian tribes never accepted this cultural expansion and the result is that India has a high percentage of ethnic tribes which never learnt any attributes of civilization. Numerous tribes even rejected the role of a priest in their functions. The Panch Brahma operate in Andhra Pradesh without a Brahmin in their rituals. Even the ones whom the Indo-Aryans found unsuitable for being designated dvij (twice-born) status acquired it overtime. The Maravas in Tamil Nadu and the Marathas in Maharashtra refused to accept the lowly Shudra category and became virtually Kashatriyas.

The later day arrivals — the Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, Sakas, Kushans, Huns being conquering tribes were accepted as dvijas reluctantly. Initially they were called the mlechchas (one whose language was incomprehensible).

All this goes to show that the rise and acceptance of what we call Hinduism (originally Aryanism/Brahminism) has not been universal or very friendly. In the eastern part of India the Mongoloids groups retained their identity over a long stretch of history. As we read Mahabharata these tribes find a respectable mention and several of Pandavas married into these distinguished tribes like the Nagas, Kiratas etc. The Kamakhya temple near Guhawati is widely accepted as a great seat of the Shakta

branch of Hinduism. The worship of Goddess Kali in Bengal and elsewhere is also traceable to its original roots in magic, witchcraft and tantras. Ramayana took time to become acceptable in these parts. The history of Assam/ north east has emerged as a distinct part of India's history.

Under the circumstance generalizations about the reach of Hindu rituals, texts, languages etc. are extremely dangerous and quite unacceptable to a large body of scholars. It is no surprise then that each ethnic group in India has its own history, sense of belonging, a distinct culture etc. even when they may notionally accept Hinduism as a faith or a ritual.

In essence therefore beyond certain practices and rituals it is difficult to identify a core in the body of religion called Hinduism. What appears almost certain is that Hindus live by and largely on three different planes — at times distinctly different from one another but mostly these distinctions are so blurred that a Hindu could be seen to be living at these different planes almost concurrently. For example, except for a handful of Hindus no one reads Hindu texts in the original. The result is that what Hindus believe and practice is based on hearsay — which could range from scholarly, qualitative understanding of the text to a shallow interpretation of rituals verging on superstitions and black magic. What is most confusing is the range of beliefs, understandings and levels of

faith. Hindus therefore do not find any contradiction, e.g., between the daily worship of Kali and the adherence to Marxian principles of social justice. This blurring of rational territorial claims is peculiar to Hindu life and practice. Everyday numerous confirmed atheists finance religious pilgrimages of their family members. While they mock at these practices they find no courage to speak out the same within their own households for fear of social or family reprisals.

If only everybody could understand that it is difficult to have a commonly acceptable definition of Hinduism, its rituals and mythology a possibility could be explored to define a common core for Hindus and their faith. The diversity in Hindu faith and culture is such that unless people remained vague about its common core and continued to practise what they thought was the 'real' Hinduism, Hindu society would fall apart because of the apparent contradictions in the nature of its beliefs and ritualistic practices. Even the so-called practising 'secularists' openly indulge in the worship of gods/goddesses and all the rituals associated with such a worship that it is not easy at that time to distinguish them from the other hordes of practising communalists. No one questions them for 'real' motives and definitely no one refuses to accept them as one of their own. Call it hypocrisy, tolerance or liberality Hinduism has a case built for them.

One is struck by the fact that historically it is quite possible to establish the unchanging character of Hindu society, its rituals and beliefs with minor local variations and historical accidents. Indeed this is one of those things, which confuses both its own followers and outside observers. This is one reason why it is necessary to stress two points: a) all Hindus do not live on the same plane of faith/rationality; and b) since majority constitutes of the poor and illiterate they are doubly deprived — they are neither articulate about themselves nor do they have any access to Indian/Hindu heritage through literature or monuments. To speak on their behalf is illogical. The attempts made to define Hinduism are therefore only partial and lack historical validity. Thus what we claim to know and talk about is Hinduism in its generalized practice with very little 'core' to fall back upon.

This is one good reason why Sanatan Hinduism is claimed to possess five identifiable, recognizable and very distinct characteristics. Professor Baidyanath Saraswati has made an attempt in this regard, which is as logical as it is well informed. He starts his descriptive analysis with a prefatory remark that Modern Man has no sense of history. He lives in the present and disowns the past and has no care for the future. In the age of instant coffee this was only to be expected. Hinduism is breaking as a federation of faiths because modernists find it difficult to

discern the historic genealogical connections among the Sampradayas (Sects or branches). The secularists deny the truth-value of Hindu temples. As already stated Ramakrishna Mission sought a legal definition of its existence as a non-Hindu institution. The modern god-men with their international clientele are a danger to Hinduism. Their effort is equal to the anti-Hindu politics of the day in the name of Muslims/minorities.

'Hindu' does not emerge as a category either in ritualistic tradition, or in secular tradition, or in secular identifications in such critical contexts as marriage, food, inheritance or occupation. A Hindu is not a non-Hindu — a category created by the Muslim rulers and therefore the Christian rulers perpetrated it to distinguish various groups from one another and also from the federation of faiths called Hinduism like the Jains, Sikhs, Aryas, Buddhists etc.

The use of the term 'Sanatan Dharma' — the eternal tradition whose source defies Space and Time is the monopoly of the traditionalists in a very archaic form. In reality this term has persistent features of our faith conveying both primal and contemporary characters.

Professor Saraswati finds *Pancha Lakshana* — five characteristics, which though not exhaustive do convey the basic nature of Hinduism.

1. Nirbandha: Sanatana Hinduism is not a formally constituted body. It is Anadi, without

foundation, Arupi, without form, and hence Nirbandha i.e. without ties. Even its Sampradayas (sects) are Nirbandha. They are founded like Islam or Christianity but not as self-governing systems. Each Sampradaya has well-defined boundaries but all are together in Sanatana Hinduism. Sanatan Hinduism is the one that subsists in many Sampradayas put together. It is within the Sampradaya and yet it is without it. As a piece of salt dissolved in water which is neither 'within' nor 'without' — Sanatan Hinduism is a mass of wisdom, Prajnana.

A Sanatan Hindu is within this world. Yet he is 'without' it. The concept of 'Jeevan mukta' — liberated in life, applies to him fully. Human life has been ordained to be lived in four fold stages of Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprashta and Sanyas. Of these last two are aimed at forsaking the world. Although opposing in character they stand together in an interactive and organic relationship to one another. In effect they are counterpoised. Artha and Karma are allowed to culminate in the finality of Moksha, the state of transcendence of all other desires.

Nilkantha: Sanathan Hinduism is the one whose body is Sampradaya but it is other than Sampradaya which only the wise know is the real inner controller. The Sampradayas are strung together by the thread, the inner controller, Sanatan Hinduism. They do not conflict because of the inner controller. Just as Ganga and Yamuna at Prayag retain their colour

identity and yet flow as one great river together, the Sampradayas retain their identity despite their confluence/confederation.

Hinduism has been likened to Lord Shiva taking Halahal — the deadly poison that no one is willing to accept — neither the gods nor the demons, and even after taking this poison He succeeds in neutralising its effect by isolating its impact within his throat. Of course the neck turns blue but beyond that all other damage is controlled. Hinduism absorbs agreeable as well as non-agreeable elements—assimilating the former and isolating the impact of the latter not unlike Lord Shiva whose Nilkantaha Synodrome has been used to demonstrate a reality otherwise inexplicable.

3. Nityashudha: The question arises how does Sanatan Hinduism maintain its inner purity in the face of its all-embracing character?

Professor Saraswati maintains that purity is not the attribute of a person, or an object, or an act. It is a transcendental value ascribed to a person, object etc. with temporal variations in social usages. But whatever the variations its transcendental significance, Phalaphala, or the merit, remains unchanged. Since temporal variations are subject to periodic scriptural reinterpretations, the Achara, or cultural behaviour may change without affecting the primal nature of purity.

Purification is a process and it is realizable at the highest level of realization; when the mind is

purified the impurity of body does not matter. This is what Aghora ascetics demonstrate in their life-style. In the Turiya-teeta state one comes closest to the Supreme Being/Purity.

Thus by periodic Tarkashuddhi of scriptures and by persistent demand on vyaktashuddha purity of person, Vastushuddha, purity of object, and Vicharshuddha, purity of thought, the Sanatan Hinduism operates at the societal level as a self-purifying system, and hence is Nityashuddha, eternally pure.

Nityamangala: Sanatana Hinduism has been called as Nityamangala, eternally auspicious. Auspiciousness, like purity, is a transcendental value and not an attribute of time, event, place or persons. Notwithstanding its temporal variations, it significance, as of purity, remains unaffected, unchanged.

It is important to state that both purity and auspiciousness are transcendental values. A person who is Shuddha (pure) is also Shubha (auspicious); an object that is Shudha is also Shubha. Shudha and Shubha have been used almost synonymously without making any qualitative difference; their transcendental meaning and significance remain unchanged.

Sanatan Hinduism has many rituals which point to the fact that purity and auspiciousness are human needs. The harmony between these two values determines the well-being of man. A ritual is not only a harbinger of purity it also

brings in auspiciousness. The more perfect a society, the greater is the number of rituals it practices.

The Sanatan Hinduism contains Shubha, Shubha inheres Goodness, and Goodness contains Truth.

Nityanand: The Supreme character of Hinduism is Nityanand — the eternal bliss. In philosophical tradition Anand is synonymous with Brahma, the Ultimate Reality. In simple terms Anand is an experience of reality. There are different levels of experience. The supreme experience is identified with the Ultimate Reality. There are different levels of experiences. The Supreme Reality is Brahmanand, Kshanik-ananda is temporal reality of short-lived days.

Sanatan Hinduism epitomizes Ananda — the images of all Hindu gods and goddesses reflect this attribute. No Sanatan ritual is devoid of aesthetic value. Music and dance are the twin paths of devotion. Competent performers realise Brahmaswadasahodarah, the tasting of Brahma.

A Sanatan Hindu life is dedicated to rituals and festivities but that does not prevent one to enjoy earthly comforts, Bhoga. At the highest level Bhoga and Moksha are indistinguishable. Acharya Rajnessh propagated precisely this aspect of Hindu philosophy.

As a religious system Hinduism is unfounded, unformed and hence eternal and without ties. Sanatan Hinduism rests on the principle of one,

and many. It has conformed to multiple forms. Sanatan Hinduism prepares man for the Ultimate Experience. There is no room for conversion. Proselytization is not the function of Hinduism. It abhors untouchability both as a concept and practice because it is equated with degeneration. Suffering, inauspiciousness, untouchability and renunciation of Bhog are variants of degeneration and hence are a taboo in Sanatan Hinduism.

I found an attempt to define Hinduism by one Harshavardhan Tyagi from Bijnor (*Times of India*, 14 May 1998) interesting. He declared that a Hindu is a person whose religion grants him four freedoms:

1. Unfettered freedom to reason
2. Absolute freedom of following any Sampradaya
3. To declare without fear that there is one God, and
4. Lastly, to deny even the existence and Reality of God.

To call such a faith or a practice fascist is stretching one's reasoning a little too far.

Without touching upon various other aspects of Hinduism such as varna-vyavastha, jati and the place of woman in society etc. one cannot claim to have completed the discussion. Numerous questions arise in one's mind no sooner one talks of Hinduism in its contemporary perspec-

tives. The relationship of social inequality with caste and poverty is one such question whose legal, philosophical and historical explanations do not always converge on reason. While legally and philosophically claims have been made that castes or jatis do not make individuals either poor or unequal, historically inequality both as a concept and practice is endemic to Hindu society. Similarly, while Hindu goddesses perform and rank almost equally with their male counterparts and no ritual is complete without the presence of Ardhangini, women have traditionally been accorded lower status in Hindu society. Despite all kinds of historical proofs to the contrary they have as yet to acquire a role and status commensurate with their potential. These facts of life undeniably embarrass Hindu thinkers and social workers alike. Ever since caste and sex have been seen to yield political dividends all kinds of literature and debate has been allowed to dominate India's political- social firmament with a kind of reformist zeal. In the process exaggerations and distortions have been allowed to vitiate any sober and meaningful discussion.

What then are the historical antecedents of these issues and what are the reasons for their distortions, if any? While continuing with the discussion it is perhaps necessary to remember that through selective quotes it is possible to establish the validity of any claims an author may propose to make. The recorded discussions

and debates are spread over a period of nearly three millennia and contain such diverse material that one could take any position with impunity. Also, since all these records are of the elite, vocal and interested sections of society we have only partisan viewpoints. What may come out at the end of our discussion is the conclusion that at no single point in India's history has our society accepted either the Brahmanic or the non-Brahmanic (the Buddhists, the Jainas, Charvakas etc.) traditions in toto. No one therefore need to take a rigid stand about them and declare available any particular conclusive evidence to support his pet idea. However what one could accept is the dominant position of a particular tradition at a given point of time but dissensions within the ranks are also equally prominent. In brief, in the long rūn of acceptability we find that Brahmanic traditions had a slight edge over all other traditions. Indeed, the Brahmanic dominance received a great boost, because during medieval times India sunk into mass illiteracy. For all others there was a general lack of official patronage. When combind together they posed a serious threat to the very existence of Hindu society. And when one adds to these two the arrival of East India Company and other Western powers the situation becomes complex. Concepts hitherto unknown and totally unfamiliar became common and were used to define a social order which refused to be limited to those concepts

and categories. Until this day we continue to use Western categories and classifications without realizing that all societies are unique in number of ways and just as idioms and metaphors cannot be translated social fabric per se is also impossible to be classed and labelled in all its ramifications. Each custom, ritual or a tradition has a history and histories of society very rarely match or have parallels.

To the question whether or not Hindu society is hierarchical in nature and divided vertically the answer is both yes and no.

This question has been answered in detail by Surabhi Sheth. According to her — an opinion supported by many other scholars, hierarchy is not the concept used by the Hindu law-givers to describe their own society. They do not propound or uphold hierarchy as a principle of social organisation. They also do not talk in terms of a rigid, valid-for-all-times structure or ideal comprising of the 'upper' and 'lower' beings or strata. Society for them is maintained not by what we generally call hierarchy but by order (rta or Dharma). Dharma to them does not signify hierarchy per se, but a natural order that maintains everything in a state of harmony and balance, internally within the individual self and externally in the society and the universe at large. It thus minimized conflicts and maximized cooperation so that individual salvation becomes possible for all. The relationship between the strata and order has to be overseen by a secular

power. According to the ancient Hindu law givers there are certain given eternal features in any social organisation.These have to be governed by the principle of rights enforceable by secular power, or by the intrinsic highness of the 'high' and lowness of the 'low', i.e. not by the principle of hierarchy.

We should remember that hierarchy is maintainable only through external force and coercion which by their very nature are conflictual and disintegrative. For the ancient Hindus the society was governed by Dharma (order, duty) which transcends hierarchy.

Relationship between different groups, and between the individuals and the collective lot are ordered not through the notion of 'rights', but 'duties'. The only right conceded, be it to an individual or a group, is the right to compel the concerned parties to perform their duty. No intrinsic rights are firmly enjoined to one's status. Hierarchy can never constitute its own justification. Dharma alone was regarded as self-contained requiring no justification outside itself. The opposite of equality is not hierarchy as the Western scholars assert but order, and the opposite of Dharma (duty) is not right, but license (Swacchanda or Swecchachara).

The obsession of the Hindu law-givers is stability, harmony and the maintenance of order and that too not through any external authority but by the rule of Dharma.

Dharma, says the Mahabharata in Santiparva, is the mainstay of the entire world, everything is established in Dharma. Neither the state nor the king and neither the mace (danda) nor the mace bearer (Dandika) govern the people. It is only by Dharma that people secure mutual protection.

Like the term Dharma which is equated with the Western concept of Religion, the term karma is also defined by the Western scholars. They along with the Westernised Indians view it as something which "justifies the seeming injustices of life and is principally responsible "for the backwardness of Indian people".

But the fact that karma was a major discovery of the Indians to explain the discrepancies and inconsistencies in the theory of Dharma has been overlooked. Karma alone helped to explain why 'good' people suffer in life and the bad prosper — a question which Plato attempted to answer so elaborately and yet so incompletely. It is true when Indian society became unequal due to changes in the occupational structure the theory of karma was used to justify injustices in society. But neither as a concept nor as a principle does karma have anything to do with historical progression of social anomalies.

The source book of Indian philosophy traces the root of both the concepts 'dharma' and 'karma' to the Vedic concept of rta which means "a course of things", to which men, gods and the entire universe are subject. This was the

Vedic concept of an orderly universe governed by laws which did not admit of any arbitrariness.

In the Brahmana times i.e. the later Vedic period, the concept of cosmic law, rta, came to be associated with the performance of rites and rituals in the correct prescribed manner. So what originated as a natural-moral order of rta became the system of rules and sacrificial rites that determined the role and behaviour of individuals. And when a special role was ascribed to a certain class of people viz. the Brahmins, the principle of Karma degenerated into karma kanda i.e. sacrificial rites. In the process as a class Brahmins became a sanctified community and in some cases even divine. Their role as mediators between humans and gods gave them a position which was challenged both by the Brahmins themselves and later by the Buddhists and the Jains.'

The Hymn of the chanting dogs in the **Chhandogya Upanishad** was inserted to stress the degeneration among Brahmins who became more concerned about worldy comforts than about their spiritual duties. They are shown to walk in procession chanting the mantra "Om! Let us eat", "Om ! Let us drink". The Smriti literature in fact glorified the status of the Brahmins and made them reach the semi-divine status. The effort of Manu to define normal and emergent situations proved to be the real bane against social equality. In all conditions and under all circumstances Brahmins became a class apart.

The earliest non-Brahmanic philosophical systems which challenged this unnecessary social inequity were the Buddhist Order and its contemporary the Jaina sect. They disputed the very basis of the religious and social status of the Brahmins. They not only rejected the role of rites, rituals and sacrifices in the attainment of spiritual enlightenment but also rejected the authority of the Vedas and the very source of Dharma. For them Dharma consisted of universal moral ideas such as truth, non-violence, self-control and charity etc. not an inherited virtue of a Jati and Varna.

Lord Buddha declared that Varna is not a natural or universal order for human beings. He pointed out that Yavanas and the Kambojas had no varnas — they had only two classes: the freemen and the slaves and even these classes were not eternal or fixed — one could become the other i.e. a slave could become a freeman and vice versa. He even pointed out that a Brahmin woman conceived the same way as the non-Brahmin woman. Inter breeding among the Varnas and jatis was possible unlike animals. He therefore declared that all human beings were capable of emancipation through tapas and not through jatis, Varna or mantra. Emancipation was possible if one only understood the connection between the desire and the misery. The ashtamarga was the way out of the eventual cyclic birth and death order.

Brahmanahood according to Lord Buddha was not determined by birth, varna or jati but by Sila (character) and Panditya (learning). Brahmanahood was an ideal and one achieved it through austerity, chastity, self-restraint and control of senses. He wanted people to inquire about one's conduct and not jati (birth). Vajrasuchi of Ashvaghosh declares: "Brahmanhood is not (attained) by scriptures, or sacraments (Samskaras) or birth or family or vedic learning or profession. Brahmanahood is avoidance of sins."

The Jaina philosopher Prabhachandra argues a Brahmin cannot be distinguished from a non-Brahmin as a cow from a buffalo, nor is there a way to show purity of lineage. There is only one jati which becomes varnas through functional differences.

These traditions upheld the ideal that spiritual equality was attainable by all. True the impact of these traditions was the increase in the number of elite groups — i.e. the status of Kshatriyas and the vaisyas went up but did not really improve the situation with regard to the existence or even the perpetuation of caste inequalities. The concept of karma did not cease to link up past conduct with the present situation. However it merely gave hope to future upgradation through practising certain virtues and acquiring a certain quantum of knowledge. The only concessions conceded by Brahmins related to giving primacy to spiritual goals over

material pursuits. This process of accommodation is illustrated in the puranas and neo-vedantic literature and the Bhakti cults which enabled Raidas, Kabir, Balmiki etc. to acquire the status of mediators between the poor, destitute and the Lord God. In any case philosophically neither the Lokayata tradition nor the Charvakas accepted the need for any of these concepts, practices and processes because for them there was nothing to prove the existence of God or establish any particular dignity to a caste. Humans were humans and they had only this life to live. Thinking of 'hereafter' or 'beyond' was as illogical as it was unnecessary. Inequality was manmade and therefore to deny it was only just.

What is the place of the caste in Indian society and why has it persisted for so long without much modification?

It is one question which requires a straight answer.

To understand Hindu society one needs to understand its nature and proposed functions. The varna-jati vyavastha is endemic to this understanding because down to the Puranas from the Rig-Veda itself this vyavastha alongwith its origins has been repeatedly mentioned. The society is handed down to man as a readymade product with clear-cut divisions. The Purusha Sukta view of society is very mechanical in its formulation. The four-fold division of society

arising from the body of the Cosmic Man is justification enough for everyone to follow. Being Apaurusheya (not created by human) the Rig-Veda hymn is a divine injunction for everyone to follow. The Sudras are therefore enjoined upon to keep serving the Brahmins without envy or complaint. Dissent, protest and rebellion are totally incompatible with this Divine creation as described in the Purushasukta theory.

While Purusha Sukta dispensation is arbitrary in nature, the repeat description of the above in the **Bhagvadgita** adds a new dimension to it by removing the arbitrariness part and adding the rationale for inequality on the ground of guna and karma. It is the gunas and the karmas and their cumulative impact in the past lives on which is determined one's stature and position in a society. The three gunas in their various combinations and computations indicate one's swabhava (nature) which has inevitably an impact on one's actions ultimately leading to the birth in a given varna. The Jatis as we all know indicated various occupations which individuals followed in life. Therefore while varnas remained fixed, the jatis multiplied according to occupations; societies were needed for survival. The varna-jati vyavastha is also not very satisfying in terms of logic but then Bhagwadgita's explanation is much nearer reality and logical than the description of the Purushasukta.

To a very large extent the inequalities have been given a proper frame by the Bhagwadgita.

The Manusmriti provides an impressive exposition of the evolutionary scheme. The evolution of Man through various stages of insects, animals, plants, rakshasas etc. furnishes a perceptible sequential order in Manu's scheme. The creation of Man out of nothing and that too in an evolutionary manner is attributed to Prajapati who also creates four varnas. The function of this description is to provide a background to the delineation of the duties of the four varnas and of the mixed jatis.

For the first time **Manusmriti** carries details of unresolved tensions created by two contradictory pulls — the self-generating force in the universe and the fashioning of the world by Prajapati. The Jatis it is described multiply not only because of increases in occupations but also because of the crossbreeds — the *varnashankaras*.

On grounds of logic we have already seen how the Jains and the Buddhists questioned the above theories. But the fact remains that until this day a vast majority of Hindus accept that our society has been created by Prajapati in a finished form. That it is not a unified society. instead it has been divided into four distinct orders. That karma and guna have their own combinations. That the four varnas correspond to four categories of occupations that have inherent inequality and 5) being divine in origin it is futile to alter their scheme and definitions. It is much better that one accepted the Reality of castes without adding to tensions in life.

It is quite interesting to witness how castes have come to play an important role in our society. On the question whether or not castes be included in the forthcoming Indian Census a series of articles appeared in the Indian newspapers. I have a sample of these from the *Times of India*. These papers are by those who could easily be called well-informed and well-intentioned people. Therefore their arguments in favour of including caste in a Census at the turn of a millennium is proof enough of the vicious hold the caste has on our society. In fact the question of the dalits adds a dimension to this discussion because Islam and Christianity which have no place for caste-system not only claim its prevalence in their folds but want certain constitutional favours in return for nurturing them. The entire spectrum of secularists stands pitifully exposed on this point. While they would love to deny its existent reality they have only a few arguments to take advantage from its presence.

Caste in contemporary India is a crude extension of the varna-jati vyavastha (already discussed) with a repeat of all those debates which are so much a part of our ancient heritage. In this debate let us not overlook the role Brahmins have played in preserving our heritage at considerable cost to their personal comfort and fortune. Similarly the Kshtriyas in their pride of being saviours of society have helped Hinduism to live on against all odds. Even as the Vaishyas with their skills in business and

industry have allowed us to retain a semblance of modernity and riches in an otherwise hostile world of sharks and fanatics. Conversions whether out of free-will or forced may have depleted the ranks of Hindu artisans but the fact that India continues to be leader in various skills is a tribute to the various designated caste occupations and family traditions of caste-guilds.

No discussion should be one-sided. The caste was inexplicably in- human division and sanctioned hierarchy. But it had its advantages. From time to time castes have emerged to create a space of their own. Look at the Kayasthas — whose origins may not be well defined but their cleverness and expertise has been a singular contribution to Hindu ingenuity in leadership in a variety of roles is definitely well documented.

Now let us have a sample of the stranglehold caste has not only on the Hindu society but on others who have remained its victims despite conversions like the Sikhs, Muslims, Christians and the Buddhists. The way debate on caste takes place one should remember that its origins and history have lost their original meaning and past relevance. The way it has emerged in recent years surely the caste has acquired a new vigour, direction and purpose which has both social significance and political overtones. That caste can organise itself into a power group is the only relevant dimension of presentday debate and informed social organisation. Today when

various caste groups have come to be identified with certain political parties their dominance is determined by the role they play when in power. At times it is difficult to extricate regional politics with caste nepotism. Interestingly enough this entire process has helped numerous castes to turn tables against the erstwhile dominant castes. Caste and regional politics has put enormous strain on Indian society and its polity. One does not know how to predict about the shape of things to come. But one thing is almost certain. Castes would remain for quite a few decades to come as a distinctive character of Indian society and its identification with politics is more likely to strengthen its stranglehold on our common psyche.

One of the reasons why Hinduism could never acquire a proselytizing character is the question of caste. How does one convert to become a Hindu? Where is he likely to be placed? Without a caste could a Hindu have any identity? These are very important questions. Inter caste marriages and inter-religious marriages have done nothing to change the reality except that like in the past a class of cross-breeds has started proliferating which may one day become a self-contained group or caste. Today such marriages may not rouse any particular ire against them but they have not been integrated into the social fabric either. They are there on the periphery of acceptance and non-acceptance by the society as a whole. Consequently

the feelings about one's own dharma or caste or group dharma have retained their original sheen.

Of course in the past when hordes of foreigners came to India whether as invaders, traders or just mobile populations they did not find it difficult to assimilate into this society. Their occupation determined their caste and even these groups created their own castes or sub-castes. The Kshatriyas proved to be the accommodating group therefore even yavanas and sakas etc did not find any difficulty in acquiring a dominant social status by becoming acceptable as members of the ruling elite. Even large racial groups like the Jats in the north west have found it easier to become Hindus by declaring Jats a caste of the Hindus. They acquired all categories of the Kshatriyas and in fact today in terms of sub-castes they have become indistinguishable from their Kshatriya counterparts. Similar movements could be seen elsewhere too.

Today in the urban centres where one's status is largely dependent on one's income and occupation the transformation of lower castes into upper castes is not very difficult to penetrate in essence. The erstwhile carpenters have become Brahmins, numerous lower castes like chamars or jatabs Yadavas and the like. Interestingly the move is today to become members of backward communities so that reservation may benefit them. Even Muslims and

Christians have found reservation in jobs a convenient goal to stake their claims as OBCs. No one is willing to examine the logic that why should they be classed as such when they converted into a Faith which did not accept any such discrimination or distinction.

The theoretical assumptions behind the birth of caste have lost both their validity and relevance. Caste is an Indian social characteristic and its regional and local variations besides their motivations make it an interesting area of study.

Reverting to its role in the Census of the year 2001 the debate is absolutely revealing. What do Indian elite think of caste today? Is it desirable or not to include it as a category in the Census and its likely consequence have been examined by many. Here are the main issues:

While the discussion itself puts a question mark on the emphatic statements of those individuals who claim that Indian society retains its unchanging character, one should witness the remarkable ingenuity of the Hindu mind in attempting to put the caste system to certain novel uses and benefits. What could at one time be regarded as a handicap is made to look like an opportunity of immense proportions.

We may consider arguments that are opposed to including caste in the coming Census of the year 2001. Ghanshyam Shah of Jawaharlal Nehru University in his paper "Caste-based

Census will compound past blunders" (*Times of India*, May 22 1998) talks of assuming five principal reasons why caste is being considered for the Census. 1) The Other Backward Castes which constitutes 52 per cent of Indian population and are covered under 27 per cent of reservation in jobs want caste enumeration for the sake of identifying the OBCs. 2) The Ministry of Welfare wants these figures in order to monitor implementation of welfare programmes for the OBCs. 3) Since reservation for women is on the agenda these figures could be useful. 4) Political parties demand their enumeration, and 5) scholars are interested in ethnographic data. Professor Shah finds reasons why it is difficult to collect these figures. For each of the reasons cited above,the methodology for collecting data would have to be different .For one the ASI is not fully equipped. He cited the example of an individual who it would not be easy to place. For example, depending on the habitation where the count is taking place a Matiya could be a Kshatriya, a Koli and just a Matiya in his own group. According to him more examples of this nature are possible. Similarly, there is no uniform definition of an OBC. It can have a disastrous effect on the dalits and the members of the Bahujan Samaj Party. It would lead to further intensification of internal conflicts.M.N.Srinivas went to the extent of saying that such a Census would lead to wide spread social turmoil.

A.S. Abraham (*Times of India*, 23 May 1998) finds the caste system in our modern age, particularly after Renaissance and Communism antediluvian and obscurantist. The founding fathers of Indian Constitution had "reckoned that caste had for aeons played a debilitating role in the country's life and that time has come to end it". He concedes however that caste, "had guaranteed India's survival but by fossilizing it". He is surprised to note "the more we have developed, the more our political system becomes genuinely participatory and inclusive, the more we are falling victim to latter day manifestations of caste". He therefore declares that due to OBCs' problem "50 years into freedom, we are back to square one". On May 1 1998 *Times of India* had editorially condemned the inclusion of caste into the Census because while "majority of the OBCs and the Dalits still languish without rights, the 'brahmins' of all castes have prospered at the expense of others these past 50 years."

Andre Beteille's "Casting out Caste: Looking Back in Dismay" (*Times of India*, 11 June 1998) makes three points: 1) information on caste collected by the Census will no doubt be very large in quantity, "but going by past experience, its quality will be open to question". 2) in the past censuses had classified and ranked castes for 'divide and rule' principle, it is doubtful if the interested parties would not do the same now; and 3) unlike religion and language which must

form part of any Census the division of society on caste basis adds no lustre to India's diverse cultures, religions and languages. Caste has for all practical purposes outlived its social utility.

In his paper "Census Options" (*Times of India*, June 8, 1998) Narendra Pani says a clear distinction be made in the enumeration of castes and the identification of an individual on caste basis through identity cards. While there is strong case for its enumeration, the question of identifying individuals on caste basis is purely political in nature and needs to be condemned. In fact he says that caste is good for scholarly purposes but its political use is decidedly reprehensible. S.M. Dahiwale says (*Times of India*, 31 July 1998) "It is true that caste data will be used in politics and the leaders of under-represented groups will come forward to stake their claims to various bodies. But since we have accepted the principle of distributive justice, we should be prepared to accept it in practice as well."

Opinions on the issue of caste data may be sharply divided but the truth is both pros and cons are evenly balanced. It is easy to condemn caste being a throwback to past but it is extremely difficult to deny either its socio-political utility or its stranglehold on Indian psyche. Perhaps we find it difficult to reconcile ourselves to this reality.

In an interview with Registrar General and Census Commissioner a few points in the debate,

stood clarified. (*Times of India*, May 27, 1998) He denied that there was any controversy and M.N. Srinivas had reacted only to media report. Ministry of Welfare has merely asked in view of reservation policy for SCs./STs. and the OBCs whether caste can be included as an item of the Census. Even Mr. L.K. Advani did not say that caste Census was in the offing. He accepted that Census is no more than a snapshot taken at a given time. The data available on caste is of 1931 — beyond that no one knows the reality. A decision in this regard would be taken but has not been taken so far and when taken shall have no bearing on this discussion.

No matter what decision is taken the fact remains that caste is an Indian reality and to deny it is absurd. Unfortunately its influence is not waning despite all the scientific and technological advancement of Indian society. On the contrary as the revolt against its prevalence is becoming more and more pronounced its approach and sweep is engulfing all aspects of life.

The Hindu woman is yet another victim of Hindu traditions and conflicting thought processes like the ones we have about theism/caste/rituals etc. As we all know Hindu philosophy is dominantly non-theistic, intellectual, rational and extremely tolerant. One is free to be theistic, non-theistic, anti-Divine Being or even a Nihilist. Like in everything else Hindus seem to maintain a clear-cut distinction between the Ideal

and the Real. One is not the other, is quite clear to them. Pursuit of an ideal does not prevent one to digress from the path from time to time. A realist could as well be an idealist. Therefore the Hindu way of looking at the dichotomy of behaviour or thought is in reality a synthesis between the two opposites. We may worship Kali/Durga or Saraswati but an ordinary woman cannot be treated like these Divine forms. These are exceptions, not the rule. An ordinary person in normal times will behave very differently from an extraordinary person even as normal times are not comparable to exceptional period of time. An emerging reality demands exceptional response. No ordinary woman therefore deserves an extraordinary response or respect. The question therefore arises: Should it be so?

CHAPTER - 5

IMAGING HINDUS : PRESENTABLE CONTOURS

All efforts to draw a pleasing picture of Hindus and their society are bound to be unsuccessful no matter how one tends to look at them. To declare them 'fatalists' at heart and pessimists in outlook with sights fixed at the next world is as far removed from reality as the Western attempts to define the entire Hindu tradition as 'spiritualistic' has been. And a judgment like that of Nirad C. Chaudhary declaring that "there is a streak of insanity in the Hindus, it is partly dementia praecox and partly paranoia" can at best be taken as shocking, if not down right cruel. Because of the great storehouse of ideas and the vast philosophic — religious literature it is possible to corroborate not only any statement but also justifiably find endorsement for any wild conclusion that one may make about the Hindus. For instance, Bharat Ratna P.V. Kane in his **History of the Dharma Sastras**, Vol. II p. 959 talks of twelve examples of aberrant behaviour even among the gods. In the Satpatha Brahman Prajapati is supposed to have had sex with his own daughter Usha. In Udyog Parva chapter 16 of the Mahabharata Nahush tried to rape Sachi, wife of Lord Indra, and in extreme depression on account of separation from Urvashi the King Pururava wanted to commit suicide is mentioned in the Rig Veda etc. The idea, however, is not to justify these actions but to say that these things happen all the time and in all classes of beings. Even the gods are not immune. Is not this one reason why Advaita philosophy was cited by Raja Ram Mohan Roy to defend humanism and

Swami Dayanand took recourse to the Vedas to seek guidance in modern times. Even Bal Gangandhar Tilak defended girl child marriages citing select pieces of ancient lore.

If Raas is common in Brij it finds no takers in Panjab and yet Hindus are the same all over. This only goes to establish that Hindu society has been pluralistic down the history and to call anyone more 'pure' than the other is absurd. If the caste and the varna system had their roots in the most sacred literature they were not acceptable to either Lord Buddha or Mahabir Swami. The doctrine of the four goals in life — the *Purusharthas* — *Dharma, Artha, Kama* and *Moksha* finds a place in Hindu psyche but the society as a whole has never been renunciation-oriented. What needs to be clearly understood is that Hindus have always acknowledged the distinction between the Ideal and the Real. The gap between the two does not fill them with any sense of remorse. Hindus do not believe that they have come to earth because of any 'original sin' but because of the interplay of the Gunas whose combination and permutation forces one to take birth and enter the cycle of birth and death which would eventually transform an ordinary being into acquiring his 'divine' Self. The eternity of such a cycle and one's status of life have a meaning for an individual because that is the way he is bound to recognise the distinction between the real and the ideal. In the plurality of events only a few should be taken note of and

the rest do not count. Hindu gods exhibit same traits and weaknesses as ordinary mortals do. This makes human existence a very satisfying experience. Even so, those who acquire detachment, work for the common good of all and embrace the poor and the rich alike ignoring their own status in society while acknowledging that eventually good prevails are models of human behaviour. But none is perfect not even Bhism Pitamah or Yudhishthira and not even Lord Krishna in human form. The ideals inspire in affording us moments of ennoblement. The mundane may be interesting but it carries no elements of glory or eternal bliss.

One can lead the life of an Epicure without losing one's identity as a Hindu, just as an atheist can abuse all gods to his hearts' content without loss of a single step in the ladder of Hindu hierarchy. This extreme diversity of belief and practice makes Hinduism comparable to the vast Ocean in which all manner of life is possible and which also does not block a single source of incoming water. Even the pantheon of gods and goddesses is as populous even as its variety or diversity is countless. Ranging from animals, trees, rivers and all kinds of habitat Hindus find all objects in the Universe worthy of reverence and even worship.

Professor Pratap Chandra says correctly that a "a society which respects plurality has room for all kinds of people. Atmosphere of freethinking is bound to promote myriads of

viewpoints, doctrines and even systems. There will be materialists and idealists, mystics and rationalists, traditionalists and revolutionaries, idol makers and idol-breakers in such a society." On the question of continuity of Hindu culture in its most pristine form over several millennia carries within itself a possibility of arguing that it is so largely because: 1) no major upheavals have taken place, and 2) changes have been ignored or overlooked — although changes have actually occurred. The fact is that Indian history is replete with socio-political turmoils and the arrival of Islam and Christianity created conditions under which its (Hindu) survival has been really amazing. Not only are these two religions philosophically very different from Hinduism their intolerance accompanied by long political rule has been a major threat to Hindu survival. Most of the ills that we find in Hinduism today could easily be ascribed to its survival instinct which forced its real dynamism to be put on hold and to withdraw itself into a kind of tortoise-like posture of defence mechanism. The fossilization of Hindu rituals and practices appears to have everything to do with its desire to survive against all odds. It is therefore quite creditable that even under extremely hostile conditions Hinduism has lived on. Whether it is a matter about which one should feel proud or not could easily be debated.

One could discuss the question of continuity/ fossilization of Indian culture a bit more. I think

it has everything to do with: a) absence of challenge from within to change; b) fossilization is defence mechanism under hostile circumstances, and c) change has a relationship with education. Sense of direction comes from hope, aspiration to achieve and sustained interest in the system is the result of understanding which in turn is dependent on education. On each of these premises one could write volumes for support through either illustration or evidence.

Let me make it clear that I have no political or social commitment on the issue. But I think majority of historians have overlooked linkages of education with change, and of external threats or lack of support systems with change etc. As I think more and more on this point I have a feeling a ritual could acquire the status of a superstition if an understanding of its purpose or rationale behind it is missed at the appropriate time or in the right spirit or in the correct language or form. Once again this means that to develop understanding one needs education, and education could be extremely useful to develop proper skills of communication.

I am not blaming the Muslim rulers for not offering patronage to Hindu learning because toward their own community too they had elitist and sexist biases. Very few of the Muslim rulers appreciated or were even aware of Hindu learning and definitely those who indulged in this rather non-Islamic activity found it difficult to elicit positive responses from their ulemas.

I have no intention of suggesting that the earlier Brahmanical period took care of all in relation to education but at least there was a community committed to its continuance even under threats of dire poverty. That this system too could be termed exclusivist (for Panini said no one should be married unless one had read Grammar) and class-based is not too difficult to prove. Beyond that system there were tribes which had their own rituals, priests and practices and even now what they do could always be called superstitious or witchcraft. In reality however many of their tribal rituals and practices are more sensible and eco-friendly than what the highly educated urban elites believe or practice. The monk orders of the Buddhists and the Jains did not always prove to be people-oriented or poor-friendly. But these people (monks) did go to the ordinary people and explained their learning to ordinary farmers and the village craftsmen. Until this day even after a thousand years or so of Muslim and Christian rule in India the village folks exhibit more scientific knowledge about seeds, sowing, weather, insects, plants and trees etc. than many of their West-educated agriculture scientists. The return to vastu-sastra, Indian philosophy, politics (the theory of Artha), social conduct, mathematics, linguistics and the ancient lore etc. is a living testimony to Hindu learning tradition which was either deliberately ignored or misinterpreted.

On the question of deliberate misinterpretation I would like to cite Raja Ram Mohan Roy who is universally acclaimed a leader of Indian Renaissance. In his now often-quoted letter to the British rulers he had called Sanskrit "a language best calculated to keep the Indians in the dark." He had not foreseen that some 150 years later a 'free' India would set up number of Sanskrit universities to link its (glorious) heritage with its prospective advancement in science and technology. It depends on an individual scholar to call these efforts either a throwback to India's past i e. a retrogate effort or consider them in terms of our trying to define future goals in the light of her past. I merely record here the facts and offer no comment.

The reason why India's most venerated gadfly once flourished in Oxford is that he could write a book like **The Continent of Circe**. The fact that Hindus are narcissistic needs no emphasis. They generally show a peculiar disability to be critical. Nirad Babu had shown that he could transcend these limitations.

The exclusivist system of education the British colonisers gave to India has had its own strengths and weaknesses. I have no intention of writing an essay on what they gave us or where they failed. An any rate, it was designed to make elite Indians to condemn their inheritance and glorify what they had been gifted with by their tradition. To some extent the British succeeded but not in full measure. A Gandhi, a

Tilak, a Malaviya would not hesitate to use ancient lore, literature or knowledge to strike a discordant note.

I am not one of those who believes that all ancients were giants even as we all are pygmies. But there are number of branches in knowledge in which it is difficult to excel the ancients. As already pointed out in philosophy, logic, mathematics, public administration, town planning, moral behaviour, music, literature, dramatics, linguistics etc. they must have been par excellence among their contemporaries. But one must refrain to read too much into them. There are limits everywhere.

We are passing through a self-critical phase which is a sure sign of progress. We are gradually learning that dynamism pays. The class of our society which has traditionally been good at learning things is modernising at a pace which is amazing. If on the one hand we have found certain advantages in retaining the caste structure, in all other social customs modernisation is evident. In a transitory phase like the one we are passing through numerous rituals have taken a severe beating. Of the sixteen Samskars from birth to death and beyond, several of them have been forgotten while a few that we do follow no longer survive in their original form. But what remains eternally with us is a feeling of reverence for these rituals. Neither the caste dharma, kul dharma nor the varna-asharama vyavastha has survived either

in its original or even in its transformed, modernised form. The family structure has crumbled down and along with that has vanished the sense of altruism. Of the four Purusharathas only Artha remains dominant. Even Kama has been subjected to Artha and the ideal of Moksha survives only as a vague desire. Lord Buddha refused to answer the question regarding the nature of Moksha by saying "the knowledge of these things does not conduce to holiness". Instead what was necessary to know was what Buddha has already taught — the truth of suffering.

Lord Mahavira had said it was Dharma which was supreme. Dharma was non-violence, self-possession and asceticism.The Mahabharata declares "Neither is there Moksha in lack of passion nor is there bondage in possession and prosperity. Whether it is the one, or the other, it is knowledge that sets a person free."

Today's Hindus have little time and even less patience in trying to discover the real meaning of **Life, Death, Dharma, Moksha** and the like. They probably have an excuse for what they do. Which text to follow and which interpretation to accept is in itself a big problem.

To call Hindu society stagnant or inelastic is to deny the reality of change which has occurred in all its dimensions. We have changed and also retain the ability to survive in all kinds of adversities. The rate of success of the Hindus outside India and their ability to compete has,

demonstrated clearly that Hinduism may be dying in certain respects but Hindus are a living people who know that the law of change is as eternal as the Death is an eventual Destination of all.

The modernity which has struck Hindu society can be observed in their newly-found appreciation of discourses on the Bhagwad Gita, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The way such discourses have become popular is amazing. Ever since long and arduous journeys to piligrimages have become easy, Hindus can be seen flocking to places of worship in far flung areas of India. In a way, Hinduism is getting revived in its most modern, customised form.

There are a few points on which a kind of debate goes on: the question of idol worship, the issue of untouchability and correspondence between tradition.and rationality — all in the context of the Hindus — as if none of these things have any relevance in other groups of Indian people.

I think in the context of Hindus it is of paramount importance that we appreciate the relevance of the discussion on "rationality versus intuition". It is claimed that the development of West has essentially been science-based and science per se has no place for intuition. Science needs verifiable evidence to support intuition and in science verifiable, repeatable and demonstrable evidence alone is acceptable therefore it must necessarily be opposed to in-

tuition. This has been an additional argument to say that the West and the East do not have many meeting points if they are not exactly irreconcilably different. Additionally, science by itself may be a tradition but traditions by themselves need not be science based. All these arguments cumulatively go to establish that Hinduism which lays a great store by tradition is anti-science, intuitive and contains very little, if at all, any demonstrable, reliable and verifiable evidence to show either its inherent merits or claims for its continuance in a rationalist, non-traditionalist world Indeed, one of the reasons why Hindus leave their faith in favour of Islam or Christianity is that after conversion they have a feeling of great cohesiveness, rationality, brotherhood, and commonality of appeal in their adopted faith against others. Hinduism has no Church or an ecclesiastic order to defend it in self-interest. For a Hindu it is immaterial whether some one remains within its fold or would prefer to leave it for it has a pronounced EXIT mark but no ENTRANCE sign. Hinduism unlike Islam is not a religion of protest therefore it does not complain against anyone. It accepts Reality as it is presented because the rest is Destiny — the inscrutable Niyati from which there is no escape.

There is a large ground for conceding these arguments. But what is true is that Hinduism is not anti-science. Instead, it is rational and has enough grounds to compete with the West for similar approach to accepting/ adjudging

objective reality. In terms of evidence Hinduism can match Western science in its preference for verifiable, demonstrable proof under its Lokayata tradition/school. In the Sutras of Brahaspati it is stipulated that earth, water, fire and air are the basic elements world is made of and consciousness arises from matter like the intoxicating quality of wine after fermentation of yeast. Even soul is no more than consciousness attained by body through a process and after this life there is no other life or place to go. Is this school of thought very different from Western Materialism?

Most of Indian philosophy is anti-Divinity though not necessarily anti-Spiritualism. Therefore Hinduism does not bar the possibility of being compared with the West on grounds of rationality. After all, reason and intuition may differ in approach and methodology but not in the ends. Their essential purpose is to discover Truth. Even the greatest discoveries of science carry an element of intuition. Information — or it's cumulating does not yield knowledge. To find true knowledge one must pass through the stage of intuition. To be precise, collection of information alone is not knowledge and knowledge by itself does not transform itself into wisdom. Information to become knowledge has to take recourse to collection of facts, classification of areas and an inner urge to come to some conclusion. Newton's apples have to fall into a pattern to enable him to discover laws

of motion. Without insight into a given pattern apples may go on forever falling as they have been since times immemorial. Not only a Newton is needed to discover a pattern but also the pattern has to be repeatedly verified to make a law. Collection of facts into a pattern needs intuition to overcome the illusion where trees are being confused for woods.

All that I am saying is that even a scientist finds himself clueless without the help of intuition to formulate any model or design or advance a theory. Different steps in the discovery of Truth are not adversaries — they are mutually supportive and interdependent. How then can the East or Hinduism be anti-thetical to the West or its science? There are numerous scientifically valid Truths which the ancients had discovered without any help from modern equipments or any precedent. For instance, the Rigveda talks of thousands of solar systems/constellations and the Agni Purana explains the smallest unit of Time as well as its infinite form through the help of a single ray of light passing through a keyhole. For a detailed discussion on Time (kaala) read, **History of Dharmasastras**, Vol. V, Part I, pp. 463 onwards, BORI, Poona, 1958 in which P.V. Kane discusses the concept, nature and significance of Time. Whereas for a Buddhist time is not a thing but only a subjective condition of human sensorial experiences and intuitions and is non-existent in itself, apart from the subject, the Jains believe that Time is one of

the six individual padarthas. The Hindus hold that Time is beginningless and endless, very much more subtle than the subtlest. "Time creates Beings, and again destroys them: all are under the rule of Time, while Time is not under anyone's dominance". (p. 473).

I am no scientist myself but even I would aver at times Truth does not wait for an evidence to precede its discovery and science also skips steps in its final climbing to Destination Truth/ Law. I think the term 'serendipity' carries within itself an answer to this debate (For details on the subject of *Reason and Tradition* see Prof. K.J. Shah's paper in a seminar proceedings available in Nehru Memorial Museum and Library on Contemporary Character of Hinduism).

I believe that enactment of a law does not necessarily follow its compliance. If all laws were obeyed or were possible to implement all societies would be trouble-free and all individuals happy and contended. The fact is that the laws merely indicate an intent of being or making all ideal. But an intention is not always achievable — as they say, there is always a slip between the cup and the lip. If wishes were horses no one would walk on foot.

Hindu society is accused of being unequal and hierarchical. But we have referred to this contention earlier by denying its any approved status. The hierarchy concept is a Western imposition of a category without which they can

not understand how a system can exist or survive. They made a horizontal Indian society into a hierarchical one in their observations and since Indians do not hesitate to adopt or adapt foreign concepts particularly if they emanate from a system which they were once forced to accept as superior, they continue using it despite all the evidences against its use or acceptance on grounds of its non-applicability in the Indian context. (*Read*, Dharampala).

In Reality however we are an inequitous society and over a period of time may even have become hierarchical. But there is no approval for all this. Gandhiji entered into a debate on the subject with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and tried to assert that "caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know". He may appear protective of caste Hindus but in fact in his thinking he was no less a revolutionary or radical than Dr. Ambedkar because his concern was not a section of society but the whole of it.

The caste and inequality, the caste and untouchability, and the caste and social hierarchy are issues on which a few sacred texts are very vocal and at times even supportive. But there are reasons to believe that all that is written on caste discrimination was not really practiced. Or else, why would Vishwamitra enter into a dialogue with a Candala on his desire to eat a dog's tail? Or why would a job taken up by Raja Harishchandra of collecting taxes on

burning funeral pyres for a Candala be made to look only cruel and not socially unacceptable? How else could Sumanta, the chariot driver of Raja Dasrath become his confidant and a dasiputra Vidur become acceptable as a Prime Minister of the mighty Kauravas? Examples could be multiplied to underscore the point that reality was considerably different from what we read in the ancient lore and literature.

No one needs to justify a bit the discrimination we see today in Hindu society. We know nothing what it was like a thousand or more years back. Probably India was not all that poor or had not been under a long period of hostile subjugation and infested with mass illiteracy, abject poverty and misconceptions of several hues borrowed from languages which know nothing of Indian tradition. They perhaps have no equivalent terms to enable them to understand Indian concepts in their own languages either. For instance, Dharma, Karma etc. have no equivalents in English. There should have been no confusion had these concepts and terms not been discussed in a language which neither had any practice nor concept even vaguely resembling these terms in their original meaning and context.

European historians are not agreed on the point: That a few civilizations live on while others when they decline, die out and disappear forever. Spangler, a German historian, after analysing the historicity of thirty civilizations concluded

that except for seven or eight of them the rest took birth, grew into maturity and disappeared without a trace. In a way civilizations resemble human organisms that take birth, mature and decline in order to finally die out. Prof. Toynbee in his Study of History, discovered a principle behind all this in terms of a time frame i.e. for example, Indic civilization in India started in 1375 BC and declined in 755 AD Around 776 'Hindu' civilizations took birth and that too declined in 1175 AD One may find these analyses very tedious to accept but what they talk about is a major question and scholars believe that understanding this phenomenon of birth and decline of civilizations cannot really be understood properly until we overcome our pre-conception and emotional involvement/ identification. I tend to agree with this view. Our likes and preferences apparently cloud our judgments.

The great patriot and nationalist fighter Vir Savarkar had pointed out that Hindu society is bound in seven chains and these need to be broken. These chains are: untouchability and several types of taboos such as travel across the seas; common kitchen for all; inter-caste marriages; study of sacred literature by all; disapproval of a few occupations in communities and re-entry of converted Hindus to other religions.

I recall during the partition days several Rajput converts to Islam around my village

proposed to come back to Hindu fold. But no one was willing to accept them back even after a few Arya Samaji's agreed to preside over their entry/re-entry ceremony. These very Muslims are a problem now for quite different reasons. Although on all other taboos the positions have undergone sea change. For instance, who bothers about travel across continents or community feasts, inter-caste marriage etc.? In fact if upper caste Hindus had a way to become SCs. or OBCs via inter caste marriages, these categories would vanish overnight. The present taboo is a political convenience and not a social problem. Down the ages women have ignored class/caste boundaries for sex and marriage. Indeed one of the earliest mentions of a crossbreed (varnashankar) is traceable to the Mahabharata. In Vanaparva Yudhisthara says that it has become difficult to decide about one's caste because of the crossbreeds. All types of marriages are taking place all the time among all castes and men and women. Therefore the wise go by the character and not the caste. The story of Satykama Jabala is an endorsement of the assertion by Yuddhisthara. The teacher after learning that Satykama's father could not be identified by his mother accepted him as a Brahmin because of his abiding truthfulness. The character of a Brahmin is therefore what determines his true lineage and not his known father who may or may not be a Brahmin.

Theoretically our ancient texts have given characteristics of all castes. We should remem-

ber that these were not always found in the castes supposedly possessing these traits/abilities/characteristics. We have more examples of deviants than those of the conformists. It would appear that these characteristics were designed more to describe an ideal rather than a reality. Unfortunately we continue to talk of these things as though what is accepted as Truth is also the Truth. Even Truth could be partial even as a lie could spring from the Truth itself. For example, we know that anger is not a permissible or approved trait in a Brahmin, yet Durvasa and Parusuram were hotheads ever ready to pick a bone with anyone. Dronacharya nursed a feeling of revenge against his classmate King Drupad and did not rest until he was brought bound in chains before him by the Pandavas as part of their full and final payment of tuition fees (Guru Dakshina). Or look at the way Ravana behaved with Sita or the arrogance he habitually showed in his court ? I have cited these examples only to underscore the point that the ideals are expected to be achieved but in reality they are difficult to possess or accomplish.

Srimad Bhagwat Gita talks of caste characteristics according to the interplay of the three Gunas (Satva, Rajas and Tamas) which eventually influence one's actions leading to a kind of caste classification called varna-vyavastha. The Gita declares a Brahmin to be calm at heart, should have self-control, be pure, tolerant, simple or unpretentious, scholarly and

in possession of sacred/spiritual knowledge etc. In terms of Gunas he should be Satvik. Kshatriyas should be brave, impulsive, emotionally balanced, forgiving, adept in administrative skills and not prone to running away from the battlefield etc. It is interesting to find that while running away from battlefield may not be a great attribute or a trait one of the names of Lord Krishna himself is Ranchod — one who ran away from the battle field. The story in reality refers to His leaving Mathura for Dwarka because of the constant attacks by Shishu Pal on His recently acquired kingdom.

Agriculture, trade and animal husbandry were reserved for the Vaisyas and the service and help to these three castes or varnas was assigned to be performed as a role for the Shudras.

Bharataratna P.V. Kane in his concluding volume acknowledges the fact that this four-fold classification did not exhaust the reality of the numerous castes that existed even in the days of the Mahabharata. One's birth into a family alone did not always determine one's caste because the term 'family' itself can have several definitions. Even marriages could take many forms. I have no wish to enter into an avoidable argument on the question whether our contemporary middle-class concepts of marriage and family really exhaust the variations found or are possible under these terms.

In the post-independence period we notice not only a revival but a virtual glorification of

our ancient heritage including its learning traditions. In contemporary India we have universities devoted to ancient Indian learning including a world-wide interest in Sanskrit language which has been found to be lexically, etymologically and grammatically superior to many of its contemporary languages. Ancient Indian arithmetic is currently available on CDR. Shakuntala Devi and many others after her have learnt tricks of calculations from some sacred formulae in the Vedic texts that were found to make one calculate faster and more accurate than even computers. The ancient yoga is now gaining immense popularity not merely because one could concentrate with its help or cool down in the face of immense emotional turmoil but because it has proven therapeutic value as well. Of the eight fold progressive path starting from yama, niyam, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana to samadhi — asana and dhyan have become popular. Astrology, astronomy, ayurveda, Indian philosophy and logic, vastusastra, Arthasastra and Indian grammar (Panini's Asthadhyayi — for linguistics) etc. have, of late, become popular all over the globe.

For all these reasons and quite a few others I should like to present a small introduction to Hindu learning. I am not overlooking the historical fact that revival of this learning was largely non-Brahmanic in source and European in interest but its monopoly is decidedly Brahmanic.

We all know how and why colonies were acquired and the role their missionaries and business tycoons played in their governance while spreading their own tentacles all the while in pursuit of goals set to promote certain interests. In the process, they raised cadres of efficient administrators who not only knew the rules of administration and governance but soon became adepts in feeling the pulse of the native populace as well. A few of these who did not behave like **'The Nabobs'** of Perceival Spear found time to learn what was available to learn in these remote countries of their self-chosen exile. For them European clubs and drinking bouts did not hold much charm. A handful of these in colonies like China, Egypt, India etc became Sinologists, Egyptologists and Indophiles. They not merely learnt the native languages, excavated pre-historic sites, classified their earlier currencies, but also categorised and scientifically established the potency and efficacy of local herbs, seeds, oils and other crops. These Indologists, as they are commonly called, gave Sanskrit and all the native learning stored in ancient scripts like Pali, Ardhmagadhi etc. the status they deserved. The colonisation did have a bright side too. Unfortunately we are overwhelmed by our own prejudices to either condemn or appreciate this relatively unhappy intervention of foreign subjugation.

These remarks were necessary to furnish a perspective to the discovery and recognition of

India's ancient learning traditions. The real assessment of all this took quite sometime. Therefore, what we know today is a mixture of contributions made by our erstwhile rulers and the native scholars which took time to grow and mature to our own contemporary international standards.

The Hindus believe in the infinite, beginningless and endless Time which is divided into four Yugas and in each of these Yugas (period of time) God himself descends to earth in an appropriate form to destroy evil and protect the righteous. Each of these Yugas has its designated form of God. In Satyuga God appeared in the form of Sage Kapil to bestow knowledge to the people just as He took the incarnation in Treta as Emperor Bhupal, in Dvapar He appeared as Vedavyas and in Kalayuga He took the form of Kalki for the protection of the saintly and the destruction of the wicked. Vishnu Purana gives the list of 28 names which Vyas used in different ages. For example, in Dwapar such names were used as Brahma, Prajapati, Sukracharya, Brahaspati, Surya, Mritya etc.

In the beginning of the Creation the Vedas appeared in 4 steps and are contained in a million mantras (sacred text). Since they were heard (shruti) as a Divine Revelation, Hindus hold the Vedas as Supreme Knowledge and regard them as Apaurusheya (not created by humans). There was only one Veda in the beginning. The twenty eighth Vyas under the

name of Krishna Dwaipayan divided it into four steps or parts. He trained four disciples. Vyasji in the guise of Krishna Dwaipayan delivered to Payal *Rik*, to Vaishampayan *Yajur*, to Jaimini *Saam* and to Sumantu *Atharvaveda*. A chariot driver's son Romharshan was trained to study and teach History and the Puranas. We can thus see caste was no barrier in teaching or learning of the sacred text. It would be really interesting to read the Great Indian epics — the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in order to discover the extent to which the society described in them showed signs of dynamism and modernity. Instances are shown to exist that Bhagwan Ram had no caste prejudices. For instance, he had no hesitation in accepting already tasted berries by an ordinary tribal woman, Shabari.Marriages be they inter-caste/class, tribal/non-tribal and even between the civilized, royal (naga) snake-kings and even with the cannibals(the rakhasas)etc. were openly accepted. The society was mobile and living. It got fossilized mainly due to internal dissensions and external threats.

As we now take up Hindu learning for discussion in contra- distinction to the several other systems advocated and followed vigorously, we must remember that India's known past dates back to 3500 B.C. It is therefore not very surprising that when we talk of our ancient system/s of learning tradition/s we acknowledge that what the Jains and the Buddhist Orders regarded as proper education

and offered it accordingly is decidedly not what the Hindus had accepted as ideal for their own people. Also, because both the Jains and the Buddhists disagreed with the Hindu world -view and purposes and means of living, the differences in their educational systems were inevitable.

There are certain common points too among all the above-mentioned systems, besides the commonality among certain type of terms used by them. But as one examines these terms and (common) idioms one immediately notices the differences in the underlying connotations of the vocabulary used. However in regard to the acceptance of the eventual purpose of life especially in the face of the transitoriness of human existence there are qualitatively speaking, no differences of opinion. Humans take birth, therefore they must die. Change is the only permanent fact of life and Death the only Reality. When the Cosmos itself keeps on moving, changing and transforming to think of the Earth as eternal is not very logical. Life is full of uncertainties and unhappiness (Dukh). The secret of life does not lie in one's survival which of course is important but in attaining Moksha/Nirvana or the cessation of the cycle of birth and death. If this is the ultimate goal of life an educational system has to help an individual to achieve it. There may be many paths but they all must lead to only one single destination — Moksha — the cessation of the cycle of birth

and death. On this point the ancients had no major dispute except for those who followed the footsteps of the Charvakas — for whom there was nothing beyond this physical existence and once one died there was no coming back. This philosophical difference makes Indian thought interesting and the systems of education ever so varied.

With this rather very brief and important prefatory note we look at the Hindu learning — the way it considered life and devised ways and means of making it purposeful. Education in this context is an instrument aimed at helping an individual achieve the societal as well as personal goals.

We seem to have a few misconceptions regarding our varna -ashram vyavastha — the castes and the four stages of life and their relationship with education. As it is, I have repeatedly emphasised that while the Hindu caste system was and is a reality, a fact of life, but it never prevented either caste mobility or social dynamism. In our contemporary society as we talk of certain lower castes we take it that what is true today was true in the past too. It is not so. There is no evidence to suggest that the ancients had banned the entry of the lower castes from studying both the sacred and the secular subjects. P.V. Kane in his **History of Dharmashastras**, Vol. V, Part I cites Badari's Purva Mimansa Sutras to show that even

Shudras had a right to preside over the Vedic yagnas and refuted the arguments of several others who denied the existence of this right. One could suspect the possibility of caste getting identified (in due course of history) with class and thus attempting to fossilize the society but it is advisable to note that those who proposed both ideologically and otherwise this sort of caste rigidity had only a limited appeal. Hindu women down the history have been very liberal on this point.

Similarly, the goals of life may have a clear cut definition or the four ashramas (stages) in life a very logical base but how many Hindus understood their importance or followed it one could only make a wild guess. All that I am saying is this that even where laws exist to regulate one's behaviour we must not assume that all comply with them. Otherwise, there will be no hold-ups, murders or rapes. The laws are only a suggestion that one should observe rules because by following them, externally at least, one could conform to social norms, and if one did not do so, a punitive action may follow. While in the case of criminal laws a non-obedience may invite trouble but in regard to moral laws no such possibility exists except the prospects of one getting theoretically condemned to Hell. There is always a clear distinction between the real and the ideal — between pleasure and pain — between what one can actually do and what one ought not do.

Hindus believe that one can be (Agya) ignorant, beyond which one could be Vigya i.e. informed, scholarly or well-read, but one could rise above these two categories to gain entry into the select band of the Pragya or Stithpragya as Lord Krishna tells Arjun to become. If being ignorant is to live in darkness, to be a vigya is an acceptable and well-cherished goal of life. Individuals attain various stages and states of scholarship. Indeed the principal goal of education is to make one vigya - well read, skilled and may be even talented. If one proposed to rise above this level one will have to persevere on one's own to become a wise man (Pragya) who comes to know the distinction between attachment, selfishness, transitoriness of life and detachment, helpfulness and Eternity. For an individual like this one both happiness and unhappiness are alike. He could easily appreciate the answer given by Yuddhishthira to Yaksha that what amazes him the most is the fact that while all know that they have to die one day yet keep on acting as though Death would not touch them. The folly of accepting the Unreal as Eternal is what surprised him the most. The sacred knowledge (Para-vidya) leads one to transcend this limit.

The Hindus therefore believe that there are two main branches of learning — *para* — sacred lore and the *apara* — the secular knowledge. While it is always possible to acquire one single branch of knowledge nothing prevents one to

move on to another branch and learn and master that one too. For secular subjects we need a formal arrangement of teaching but for the spiritual branch the effort to pursue it is one's own including identification of a proper teacher. For example, in the Chhandogya Upanishad Narada asks Sanatkumar to accept him as his student. The teacher asks Narada about his earlier studies. Answering this query Narada enumerates the number of subjects he knows and the learning he has acquired. In the end Narada says I am mantra vid. I know many subjects but I want to become Atma vid. For Sanatakumar all that Narada knew was no more than the knowledge of words. He had not realised the Self. Considering the curiosity of Narada to know more Sanatakumar accepted him as his pupil. In the process we learn that for a good student the curiosity — the will to learn — is absolutely essential. The teacher should know that his student has the necessary attitude and aptitude to learn and a certain degree of ability as well. If learning requires a certain attitude — the teacher must also be known to be qualified for teaching. The bond between the student and teacher is that of demand and supply — if a student is unwilling to learn no teaching is possible even as what would a student learn if the teacher himself is not qualified or realised.

In the case of a curious student the teacher is expected to satisfy his curiosity i.e. student puts questions and the teacher answers. The

teacher may also put questions but only to assess the quantum of a student's information. It is the reverse of the Socratic technique. The teacher gradually guides and initiates his student into the realms of the light. That is why learning removes darkness, makes the distinction between the good and the bad clear and offers immortality. Learning is a sacred act therefore one should avoid learning from teachers who teach only for money. Money is important but unless a teacher is willing to accept the fact that imparting knowledge is the highest act of charity there is little difference between a businessman and a teacher.

How does one learn and how does one teach is interesting to know. For a Hindu there are three stages of learning — a student should listen first, then he should reflect on what he has learnt or heard and thereafter meditate. It is possible to compare these steps with the steps commonly propagated by modern day psychologists. In order to make that what has been learnt a part of one's apperceptive mass one must internalise it by repetition or reflection or else no learning is permanent. I have no wish to prove that Hindus had evolved the last word in teaching techniques but the various methods they used to convey meaning holds out considerable possibilities for anyone learning the tricks of the trade. The dialogue between Nagsena and King Menander on the real and the non-real, the stories told by Vishnu Sharma in Panchatantra about teaching

dull princes are illustrations how practical lessons were offered. Also the effort of a Rishi to help a student discover knowledge through animal husbandry (a child is asked to take a few cows for grazing and not to come back until they reach a certain number) is an object lesson in auto-learning as advocated by Gandhiji. How to teach certain concepts or attitudes like detachment through actual demonstration we have examples from yore. That is how King Videha taught Shukdeo through his refusal to see him at one stage and then on the other he created a situation in which Shukdeo learnt the meaninglessness of attachment to goods and life. There are excellent examples how the ancients taught their pupils. The contemporary relevance of these methods of teaching is worth serious consideration.

On discipline and choice Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that I have told you everything what was worth telling but what you would elect to do is your own discretion. The teacher makes no attempt to impose his own personality on the student. The only difference between a teacher and the taught is that what the former knows already the latter proposes to learn. The terms used in this connection are **Gyata, Geya** and **Gyan** — one who knows and one who proposes to know and the knowledge that exists both within and without. It is important to know that while a student may discover knowledge on his own but the helping hand of the teacher is

absolutely necessary. Whether it is skill or craft, music or speech (vak) a teacher is to be found. In the case of advanced knowledge students went from teacher to teacher. If the student could chose his teacher so could the teacher his pupils. Both had to be willing. The choices and coercion do not go well together.

It is quite interesting to note that instances exist of students who even after completing their duration of learning remain arrogant and vain. The son of Rishi Aruni named Aruneya is one such example. That learning did not yield identical results for all is made abundantly clear even as the best of the teachers could not overcome their anger, jealousy, sense of rivalry etc. Durvasa, Dronacharya even Vishwamitra are cited as less than exemplary personages. Learning was not the exclusive preserve or monopoly of any particular community. R.K. Mookerji has classified the list of Rishis whose names occur in connection with Rigveda (**Rik-Samhita**) and noted that numerically Brahmins are much less than others. Even in the preservation of learning and its propagation both individual scholar kings like Raja Janak and Ashwapati Kaikeya etc and numerous others as well as the Ashramas run by Brahmins which were mostly family dominated have been repeatedly mentioned in the literature available.

In Purva Mimansa it is mentioned that there are **four** necessary conditions for teaching. Which subject or the area one proposes to

specialise in, what is the goal of the learning, what is the relationship between that goal and mastery of the subject and whether or not that person who desires to learn is worthy of that knowledge — are matters one should inquire into before imparting instruction. Just because some one has the resources and the time for learning are not adequate reasons or necessary conditions for getting a teacher. Similarly, a teacher must also fulfil certain conditions to be able to teach and possess traits suitable for his vocation. All teachers must learn to be patient, forgiving, industrious, non-stealing, intelligent, learned, truthful, non-irascible in temper and fully self-controlled in matters concerning senses.

For the study of the Vedas Gautam has declared that for each Veda at least 12 years were necessary or until all the Vedas have been learnt by heart. The period of scholarship could last as many as 36 years. Obviously everyone could not have mastered all the Vedas. Therefore learning had to become a family tradition and certain families showed exceptional merit in learning them by heart. With time these families became Sakhas and their specialisation got identified with castes. Gotra, Sakha, Charana etc. are all part of Hindu learning tradition. Even today Hindus do not marry within their own Gotras or Sakhas — which means their forefathers came originally from the same family who learnt at the feet of the same teacher.

Students themselves became brothers at arms and in this regard castes became immaterial. Krishna and Sudama were not only classmates but friends too for life and probably became (s-gotris) because they came from the same Gotra or the place of learning.

Learning leads one eventually to liberation (Moksha) but Artha and Kama, are not to be shunned. To be able to earn one's livelihood and raise a family was one's own Dharma (despite the fact that Dharma had several types and variants). Majority of the people could not aspire for Moksha but that remained the eventual goal all the same. One learnt sacred knowledge (Mantra) or method (Tantra) and the processes to master (yantras) learning and skills so that one could lead a successful life and perform rites of the ascribed Dharma.

The number of subjects at the time of the Vedanta/Purva Mimansa, which is pre-Buddhistic (6th century BC), are 14 in all. Knowledge (Gyan) is defined as one which enables its possessor to perform his assigned job perfectly. The four Vedas, six Vedangas viz. Nirukta, Chhanda, Shiksha, Jyotisa, Kalpasutra of Ashwalayan and Grammar besides Puranas, Nyaya, Mimansa and the Dharmashastras constitute total knowledge of those times. Today Shiksha is supposed to mean education. Here it is a branch of learning — meaning thereby to learn phonetics so as to pronounce words correctly. In the oral tradition the emphasis on pro-

nunciation had to be pronounced. There are numerous jokes in the ancient literature where a mispronunciation caused havoc. Prosody, etymology, learning about stars, planets etc. formed parts of this education. Even Grammar which today is an equivalent of vyakaran only i.e. the syntax covering noun, pronoun, verb etc. originally was the equal of today's Humanities and Social Sciences put together. Panini says that those who do not know Grammar are not eligible to get married. The actual number of subjects known in the times of **Chhandogya** exceeds the one I have cited above because Music — both instrumental and vocal, painting, arts and crafts etc. are not included here. The science of preparing and using cosmetics; vastusastra or selecting one's habitation; kamasutras i.e. the knowledge of sex a householder needed to have etc. were highly specialised and well-researched areas of learning. Family was the basic institution for teaching several arts, culture and crafts and a corporation of such families formed a Guild (shreni) and in some cases these organizations restricted the entry to outsiders. Numerous guilds are known to have existed in the times of Kalidasa. Training in specialised crafts and skills was therefore the job of these guilds that could be compared today with in-house training through apprenticeship. Schools of music and certain arts thus became identified along with their variations in demonstration and performance with what are called gharanas or families today.

One must remember that in some form this ancient learning was maintained and even enriched by certain families. The richness and the variety of learning that we see today had roots in the traditions followed in the Vedic times. Even without knowing much about these traditions we enjoy the benefits of our ancient heritage which lives on despite our decrying and disowning the past.

Medicine, law, engineering and technology in their rudimentary and at times perfect forms existed even then. We may not really know which tradition had exactly what kind of roots but we cannot deny its continued existence. This is the wonder that India was at one time and here India and Hinduism are synonyms.

I personally find the principal concern of the Hindu mind related to knowing about Truth. At different periods of time they developed appropriate philosophical systems. They discovered various ways of arriving at Truth as they perceived it and that which suited their system. In the **Taittriya Upanishad** one is enjoined upon to develop an unattached mind through a process which is quite important to note and to try and compare the methods modern science has now evolved. "Let your conduct be marked by right action, including study and teaching of the scriptures, by truthfulness in word, deed, and thought, by self-denial and the practice of austerity; by poise and self-control, by performance of the everyday duties of life with a cheerful heart and unattached

mind." While we are being told to perform 'right' action and be 'truthful', study and teach scriptures etc. it is doubtful whether 'right' and 'truth' are area-specific, culture-centred or are universally valid concepts. On this point too the ancients gave us guidelines. For each individual according to the philosophy which he has come to like, follow or teach there are ways to find Truth (which it appears is relative). For instance, the Charvakas accepted only Pratayksha — what could be seen and was verifiable through eyes was the only proof of Truth. For the Buddhists and Vaisesikas — Anuman i.e. inference was added to this category of proof/ evidence. The Samkhya and Yoga accepted Sabda or verbal testimony also as proof. The verbal testimony was accepted only when the authority or the qualification of the person who gave the testimony was unimpeachable. Obviously here it is not the rank but the level of 'moral' stature one had attained that mattered. Nyaya accepted additionally Upamana or comparison too as a way of learning Truth. Since no two objects can be identical an approximation is also acceptable as evidence. Prabhakara accepted even presumption of an unperceived object i.e. arthapatti as well as being true. This means that presumption was an addition to the earlier ways evolved to learn about the nature of Truth.

For Vedanta even negation or Anuplabdhi was acceptable as proof. For instance, a man is not a woman because of certain specific reasons is anuplabdhi.

Up to this point we have a one to one correspondence between proof and logic. But the Hindu mind did not stop here. They accepted for their **Puranas** Sambhava (conclusion) arrived at by others or even Aitihya (succession of rumours) as good enough evidence to support their claims. For lack of knowledge about how and why Puranas were accepted by Hindus as sacred scriptures and the way a 'proof' could be presented/produced T.B. Macaulay made his oft-quoted contemptuous remarks against Hindu learning. We continue to have Macaulays in our midst even today. They are likely to increase numerically thanks to 'secularism' and Western impact. But what is overlooked in all this is that with all its refinement and dominance the West cannot add a single 'proof' to this list produced by the Hindu mind. If these 'secularists' do not have any understanding of Pratikas or symbols and if they do not have the perseverance of a Pargiter or of a H.H. Wilson they do not earn a right to condemn knowledge on the strength of their ignorance. Scholars in India and the West have found Macaulay ignorant about Hindu learning but no one says he was ignorant about Western learning. Partial knowledge and partial ignorance are the very fundamentals of life and living. The problem arises when a person is unwilling to accept the truth that both knowledge and ignorance could be partially valid.

Hindu learning is the result of the life time efforts made by countless scholars over more

than the span of three millennia. Therefore for anyone to advance a claim that what he or she knows is whole and complete Truth would be patently unacceptable. I particularly like the logical system which the Hindus had developed because with its help I am able to classify instances of an individual's ability to advance his case.

We all know why logic *(tark)* is taken recourse to. In case of doubt or a problem we apply our mind to find out the real nature of the doubt by seeking reasons in favour of some supposition to the exclusion of other suppositions. A final decision is then taken and we thus learn about reality. A dispute arises when we face two or more hypotheses wherein each party advances its claim to possessing valid Truth. This dispute could take the form of a **Vad** i.e. ism or a wrangle *(galp)* where the goal is to defeat one's enemy and not establish truth. In the process disputants employ destructive logic or criticism *(vitanda)* without seeking to establish any new doctrine. The logic here takes on the form of fallacies wherein the following possibilities may result:

1. The argument does not prove what it intended to prove
2. It may prove the very opposite of the intention
3. It may result in a tautology where what was to be proved itself is advanced as proof
4. Where logical arguments to support the case may fall in the category of doubt.

5. Where analogies themselves are all wrong
6. Where one may advance a logic which itself is contradictory like sound is eternal.
7. Where an unreal is shown to prove a reality (heavenly flowers smell sweet).
8. What is opposite to experience e.g. (fire is cool)

Contemporary Indian leadership mainly employs fallacies to establish truth wherein the choice of a fallacy is theirs and the judgment of conclusion is ours. In certain cases I have found that scholarship in history and education — the two areas with which I am familiar, fails to cross the boundaries of fallacies. They deny what they see and claim validity for what is not provable. For instance, on 17 September 1998 a leader in India wanted Indian government to compensate Pakistan for their nuclear tests and terrorism in Kashmir and elsewhere by giving them a two billion dollar grant. There was no explanation given for such a logic — why was India responsible for what Pakistan has achieved or failed to achieve or for their stage of economy and whether or not India herself was rich enough to afford this luxury for buying terrorism and fundamentalism. I like these fallacies for being interesting because our masses just love them.

Political parties and intellectuals who could easily be proved to have supported 'fundamentalism' and fanned 'communalism' by constantly organising and propagating it are the ones who condemn others for not following the secularist

path. I admire the ancients who could foresee the possibilities of their descendants being in urgent need of fallacies for use and therefore helpfully offered them a handful to choose from.

The theory of the **Panch Koshas** and the goals of life are integrally related. Few are able to clearly perceive this relationship and it takes considerable effort to achieve the eventual goal. The Panch-Koshas are a five-stage development of the inner self which requires both understanding and efforts to attain perfection. The material life of an individual is the primary stage (or *annamaya*) in this rank order. The physical self is necessary for its evolution into the spiritual self. Corresponding to this stage the purpose of education is to help an individual to earn his living. The second stage is *Pranmaya* Kosha, which is next to the material self i.e. Annamaya Kosha. Physical life requires 'Prana' or consciousness in the physical self to realize its potential. Without life or consciousness no individual could rise above the state of matter. A healthy body in which all the five senses — touch, smell, hearing, seeing and tasting function in a coordinated manner alone could support and sustain consciousness. Any educational system worthy of its name should help one to achieve this merit.

The third kosha is *Manomaya* which in simple language means the inner self. For attaining this state or for unfolding the self one needs real knowledge — not only a collection of information

but an integration of that information into certain patterns aimed at revealing Reality beyond words, is both a stage in one's development and a state of existence. To succeed in this effort one needs to acquire knowledge. We know that our senses and intellect alone are not competent to help us realise this goal of acquiring real knowledge or cross over into the unfolding of the fourth stage of what we call *Vigyanmaya* kosha. Firstly, majority of humans, though each is individually capable of reaching this stage of growth and development, never does really arrive here and secondly one acquires by now, if capable of so reaching, a sense of discrimination between good and evil, selfishness and altruism etc. An ideal education should help one in this effort to acquire an ability and a sense of knowing what is wrong and what is right.

When one has finally arrived or realized the 'self' through spiritual knowledge and learnt to discriminate between the senses and the spirit which governs life, and when the barrier between *Gyata* (learner), *Gyeya* (what was to be learnt) and Gyan (knowledge) is pulled down completely and irrevocably Hindus believe that it is then the Real Self is achieved. *Anandmaya* Kosha is a state of being eternally blissful and full of calm — is thus unfolded. Beyond *Anandmaya* Kosha there is nothing left to achieve except to remain in a state of eternal happiness — the *Turiya* dasha.

Theoretically speaking this *Anandmaya* Kosha in its state of eternal happiness (which is absolutely rare to achieve) is an equivalent of *Moksha*. For *Artha* and *Kama* we need education — we need teachers. In order to know Dharma we need initiation i.e. Diksha into awakening our hidden senses and powers for learning right and wrong. Here again both society and the elders are needed for guidance. The whole gamut of Dharmas — jati, kula, samaj, and the self are but stages to reach out the ultimate stage of Moksha — where *Tamas* and *Rajas* have been left behind and where *Sat* alone is real — one finds then the key to open the last door of consciousness i.e. the *Anandmaya* Kosha. This stage one has to reach on one's own. No teacher — not even Lord Krishna — could lend a helping hand. Realise yourself — therefore the prayer is : "O God! Let me leave darkness to awake in light and conquer Death to awake in immortality."

The entire exercise of Hindu learning is to see that we move from *'Pravarti'* — (the inclinations, proclivities and weaknesses) to *Nirvrati* i.e freedom from senses and their allurements. To be a *Stithipragya* is the not very difficult after all, one could always try and succeed. But what one requires are the 'will', the effort and the direction.

Imaging Hindus and their beliefs in the contemporary setting is a highly complicated affair. They would like to be judged against the Vedantic norms which we have described

already but then there are number of difficulties in doing so. The material conditions of life and living have changed radically. What remains is the label and the scent in an empty bottle. Very few know about its original form and fewer still have the will, strength or the moral fibre to follow it even if they were gifted with this knowledge. Majority will question even its relevance in the modern setting. Where spiritualism itself has been reduced to adopting the ways of big business and where speaking truth or signs of religiosity are tantamount to being old-fashioned I think this imaging has to be given a new meaning and a shape.

One should beware in this context of the class of the Left and the not so Left intellectuals who would love to disclaim anything including their heritage for being called progressive, broadminded, liberals etc. — the last thing they wish is to get associated with Hindus or Hindutva. Look at the contempt and venom they spew for anything even remotely connected with the Hindus. Our difficulty to where to place them? What is their identity? Indeed, do they really have one?

I have repeatedly pointed out that Hindus live and behave at three broad levels. These are: 1) the traditional or ritualistic 2) ritualistic against the background of understanding and knowledge of all that is associated with ancient culture and religion, and 3) who could not care less about Hinduism because like snake's skin they have got out of everything associated with it and are in the

process of acquiring an identity which is made-up of dislike, hate and contempt of what they perceive is an inferior, crude and atavistic way of life. What exactly they want needs an analysis for which I have no time or space at present. The interesting part of the whole exercise is that though they are in a small number they occupy centrestage in opinion-making, norm-setting and even offering themselves as role models.

In the last week of 1998 there was considerable discussion about the measure of a second as atomic clocks were about to be adjusted on January 1 1999. In the **Bhagwat Purana** (III, 11 3-10) the measurement has been described thus: Two atoms of time = anu; 3 anus = trasarenu; 3 trasarenus = truti; 100 trutis = Vedha; 3 Vedhas = Kshana, 5 Kshana = Kastha; 15 Kastha = laghu; 15 laghus = nadika; 2 nadikas = muhurta.

The concept of muhurta among Hindus is unique in the world and is based on astronomical principles. The placement of a planetary position has a direct bearing on human destiny. The science that explains these correlations is called astrology. While the world may mock at astrology a good mathematician can always forecast eclipses of the Sun, and the Moon, prosperity of a people or the calamities likely to befall a nation/world etc. Some of the predictions made in the Panchangs or the jantries invariably come true. The Hindu fortnightly calendar is lunar in origin yet its predictions of physical

events are found to be accurate even in nano-second terms. This amazing science developed by the ancients is a great feat of human intelligence long before observatories were set up or calculators invented. Without being superstitious Hindus will eternally be known and admired for this stupendous development.

One may read the following description of Time written some three thousand years back and reported in P.V. Kane's **Dharmasastra** (Vol. V, Section II, chapter XIV, Part I, p. 474).

"Kaala is great and the highest Lord because it is beginningless and endless, it is more subtle than the winking of one's eyes; very much more subtle than the subtlest. Its subtleness cannot be understood even by the Yogins. When a thousand leaves are pierced by a needle ignorant people think that the piercing of all leaves is done at the same time, but the reality is different — they are pierced at different points in time. Time creates beings and again destroys them; all are under the rule of Time, while Time is not under the dominance of anyone."

It is against this background we should appreciate the value and meaning of Muhurta. Originally it meant a few moments or a short time. In the post-Vedic period a day was supposed to have 15 Muhurtas and the night another fifteen. That means 24 hours of a day had 30 Muhurtas and the year 10800 (30 x 360). The Hindu year is of 360 days and a day and

night have eight prahars. The idea that a given constellation of a planetary system is *'shubh'* or *'ashubh'* is definitely a much later innovation. It was such a complicated mathematical process that a system of immediate (instant) calculations had to be evolved. Several Hindus still master this method or technique and are able to beat computers like Shakuntala devi and others. One should remember that all this is not dependent on one's faith or *astha* but on scientific learning. True, it is a difficult task but then learning by itself does not come easy.

Hindus have yet another ritual practice called *vratas* — taking a resolve(s) or decision/s or undertake a fast. While M.M. Gopinath Kaviraj declared there are 1622 vratas but in reality they number less than 1000. In other words, a Hindu could easily be on fast everyday of the year and yet not be able to follow them all. They were meant to discipline an individual, bring about homogeneity among groups of people and create 10 virtues in all. The present-day concern for lack of values is because we have failed to appreciate the meaning of these vratas and their implications for an individual.

A Hindu is enjoined upon to develop 10 virtues or dharmas before undertaking a vrata. These virtues are at once universal and secular. They are: forbearance, truthfulness, compassion, charity, purity, control of senses, worship of deities (images), offering into fire, contentment and not snatching away other's property.

The interesting part of the vrata is that a vrati must provide food for the blind, distressed and helpless — i.e. those who are without means of sustenance. In this context three terms are used — *yaga, homa,* and *dana.* "Giving up of what belongs to one is common to all these three but yaga means simply giving up something and intending it for a deity and accompanying it with a mantra. In homa there is in addition, the throwing of a thing in fire; dana consists in giving away a thing that belongs to one and creating the ownership of another in that thing".

In the Vedas we find 16 *upacaras* (ways of conduct) in the following order: *avahana* (invocation), *asana, padya, arghya, acamaniyaka, snana, vastra, yajnopavita, gandha, pushpa, dhupa, dipa, naivedya, tambula, dakṣina* and *pradakshina.* Invocation of gods with accompanying upacaras was common even during Vedic period and offering *(havya)* was meant for gods to accept. They were requested to eat the offering which were — *apupa, purodasa, dhana* (rice), milk, curds, honey etc. and of course, ghee.

The Hindu rituals have a distinct flavour of social and communal living. These days rituals have come under heavy fire both from the 'secular' rationalists and those who have little time and even less patience for their pursuit/ performance. This is another matter that without rituals most of our life loses significance and even social flavour. Instead of learning about the

meaning and this significance people follow the easier path of condemning them for waste of time as their relevance seldom, if ever, dawns on them.

We have a whole host of Hindu *tirthas* and essentials for being 'good' human beings i.e. possessing quality **Samskaras.** A tirtha is a place of pilgrimage and they are located in all parts of India. A pilgrim developes with travel a sense of national belonging besides getting the advantage of improving his inner self. If they lack courage to accept the reality of diversity they have no business in making unnecessary claims about their past glory or the fighting spirit.

An example of twisted secularist logic was advanced by Zee News in its 10 p.m. news on 3 January 1999. According to the news Aurangzeb built a temple at Chitrakut after he had failed to demolish it's already built structure. The conclusion was that Auragzeb was not only tolerant of Hinduism but built temples also. We need no proofs to accept Muslims as they are — proselytizing, exclusivists, intolerant and militant with notable exceptions, which any group of humans will have — even the talibans will have some.

I think Hindus are a very clever people. They know their interest lies in progress and not in freezing history for inspiration. Let me hope this book will help them discover the direction which they even otherwise would have taken.

EPILOGUE

In the wake of recent Lok Sabha elections a few issues got resolved therefore it has become necessary to include their review. Also the visit of Pope to Delhi on the invitation of the Government of India as State Guest had also come in for a prolonged acrimonious discussion. Vishwa Hindu Parishad with which persons like Dr. Karan Singh of the Congress Party have had long association demanded an apology from Pope on forcible conversions in the past. So not only 'secularism' versus 'communalism' has agitated Indian mind and its polity, the issue of forcible conversions per se whether by Islam, Christianity or others has suddenly acquired disproportionate dimensions. Since both have a bearing on Hinduism one could not ignore them easily.

One of the grounds on which a few religions have historically claimed their superiority constitute their belief in One God, the Sole Creator and the propagator of that belief has either been a Son of God or His Messenger. We must acknowledge the fact that Religion and logic do not always harmonise and it is extremely difficult to establish the veracity or authenticity of any statement concerning any Religion. Religion is a matter of Faith and Faith is seldom open for enquiry. No matter what the preachers of a given Religion may say or make pronouncements about, the truth is the believers do not question their own Faith. They do not do so because they cannot. In desperation, perhaps, Karl Marx had called religions "opium of the people" that dull one's critical faculties. For majority of people

born into a family their religion of birth proves to be good enough for their life-time. A few drift away from the religion of their birth for reasons best known to them. For instance, many Hindus find Islam superior because it permits them to have legally more than one wife. It matters little whether historically this permission had other grounds of acceptance than Lust. Similarly, Christianity has been found by many an entry point to prosperity. No one then realises that the suffering of Jesus had any relationship with this goal. In other words Religions are what they are perceived to be by their followers whether those who are born into it or get converted in it for reasons other then real understanding of the Truth behind proselytization. It is no surprise then that discourses on Religion rarely bring out the Reality to the fore, even if it were possible.

On second thought I suspect there are three parties to any issue that is raised in this country. The parties are: 1) political idologues who are adept in converting a non-controversial, easily resolvable problem into a major national calamity and in the heat of their passionate expositions the process becomes a product 2) the fourth estate or the media is equally, if not more, powerful and most of the time survives by distorting reality. Ever since media has come to realise its extraordinary potential to damage anyone or raise dust to cloud rationality the frequency with which it uses its newly acquired status by being both the judge and the complainant is noticeable. The media can as

easily influence election results as it can dump any civil servant, politician or an academic into oblivion. It has become practically impossible to decide who wields greater power — the politicians or the media personnel. Only God knows what they are not capable of doing whenever they join hands. The third party consists of victims of these powerful sections of our society who in their utter confusion become unsure of their own logic which could otherwise have steered them clear of any problem, issue or calamity.

I am quite sure the recent heated debates on matters like Hinduism, Hindutva, Secularism, Communalism, the nature of social harmony, etc. have unnecessarily received the attention and patronage of these powerful lobbies — the politicians and the media-judges. I am equally sure whatever remained of the humane element in Indian society would soon get considerably weakened as a result.

History would record the distortions which these lobbies have already succeeded in effecting and very soon these issues would become so tangled that even the wisest of the wise would fail to restore sanity or logic back into the on-going debate.

In this process of tarnishing each others' images the Aristotlean theory of golden mean has been totally ignored. The world cannot be divided into only two extreme shades — white or black. After all there are several shades in both and each colour has its own significance.

How can all Hindus be communal or Muslim secular? Why must Muslims need protection when Hindus themselves are so defenceless? How could one prove that the entire history of India can be sidelined to accommodate a half-truth? One could go on asking such questions endlessly. The truth is that answers do not come easily because no definitive reply is possible.

Let me illustrate my contention. For example take the issue of conversions in India. Why are a few people so agitated about it these days After all conversions have gone on for ages in this country. Change of faith is not new or else there would be no Sikhism, Christianity or others in India. Indians are free to convert to any faith they so choose.

But to my mind a conversion has several nuances. Who converts to which religion and for what reasons are as important questions and considerations as any. For example, leave alone the time when Muslims had power in India, but now why do Hindus convert to Islam? A few reasons could be clearly witnessed a) some want a second wife without leaving the first one b) has a grouse against his own community for reasons of being looked down upon or being displaced etc. c) is tempted to certain lucrative advantages proposed etc. Since no one can get converted to Hinduism for any reason whatsoever a few Hindus mind this conversion. Interestingly, a *dalit* Hindu retains his/her dalithood despite 'conversion' and in the process loses his/her original faith as well. Economic

reasons do not always play a role in this business of conversion. Also, rarely does a Hindu find Islam superior for its philosophy or value patterns. When Hindus convert as a group without losing their Hindu identity they elect to become either Sikhs or embrace Buddhism. Lower caste conversions to Buddhism are hardly a century old. During the British or Muslim rule Christianity or Islam were the preferred choices. The internal irritants of Hindu social order have however remained in place all this while. The acceptability of these converts in their own religions has always remained suspect. The attendant profits of changed social status may have looked very attractive initially but deep inside the hearts of such converts was a resentment against their parent religion which instead of getting lessened acquired a sharp edge to the venom. Like the 'new rich' they practised their newly acquired faiths with a vengeance. For example, the way numerous universities have been named after Dr. B.R. Ambedkar or towns named after Lord Buddha is a case in point.

In brief, whether Hinduism is willing to change its character is beside the point. But the reasons why Hindus get converted to other faiths is an unexplored, unexplained phenomenon, Kamala Das being an exception. One would want to be guided by research in this area and certainly as Shri A.B. Bajpai says 'a national debate on the issue' is urgently called for. I do not think banning conversions by law could be of any relief in this matter. A full scale national debate on various reasons of conversions would be helpful.

One must also examine why Christian or Muslim converts from caste Hindus rarely forsake their original identity. For instance, several Pakistani leaders still flaunt being Kunwars — which means they are converts from princely families of Rajputs. A well-known Indian historian was Kunwar Mohammed Ashraf. In the matrimonial columns of upper class caste Christian converts the marriages betray the shallowness of their love for their newly acquired Faith and a longing for the times long gone by. An intensive study would explore the hollowness of claims being made by the clergy on their behalf.

Similarly the concept of 'secularism' has been reduced to a farce both by the media and the politician alike. Left to themselves the Indian people are rarely intolerant of each other. At least neither historically nor in contemporary India there is any proof of our people behaving inhumanly against each other unless a third party gets involved. Right now, Pakistan has embittered Hindus against Muslims. One can see the inner compulsions of Pakistani governments as well. The day they stop their hate campaign against India as a separate religious nation, they will cease to exist. It is in their national interest to continue their campaign against Hindu India. The behaviour of a few Indian Muslims only worsens this matter. Bangladesi migration is a case in point.

We must not forget that Hindus and Sikhs have suffered a good deal in partition days. The debates preceding partition were usually

accompanied by communal frenzy and blood bath. Long after partition we have witnessed communal riots. What is happening in Kashmir is an extension of similar mentality. To think that all this has not left a deep scar on the Indian psyche is to ignore reality. And yet, the truth of the matter is that Sikhs by and large have retained their bonhomie and love for their Pakistani friends. Similarly, majority of Bengali Hindus have forgiven their Muslim counterparts of Bangladesh for the atrocities perpetrated on them. Majority of Hindus do not know as yet why are Pakistani Muslims so angry with them and why can t they live in peace with them. No body seems to realize that but for the politicians and the media persons Indian people would have nothing but peace around them.

I particularly blame the so-called 'secular' politicians for creating so much bitterness and dislike for each other for a very selfish reason of keeping themselves afloat. Everyone knows the Ram Mandir issue and the Babri Masjid episode is all due to the machinations of the Indian National Congress — a self-professed secular party which claims to function for the welfare of Muslims at the cost of Hindus. One needs to read Indian history a little closely to realise that Muslim League itself was a reluctant partition-mongering party that it is made out to be. The role of INC can be seen how a reluctant Jinnah was transformed into a Qaid-i-Azam by it. Similarly, when Hindus were totally ignored cultural parties like Hindu Mahasabha, RSS, Arya Samaj had to take birth for self-

preservation. If one cultural group has been transformed into a mammoth political party for the welfare of Hindus, it is now being accused of being 'communal'. But who is responsible for all this? How does one define 'communalism'? If Muslims 'vote en bloc **tactfully** to defeat Hindu BJP' and thereby find no representation in the Government they are called 'secular' because the beneficiaries of this propaganda are from INC and the Socialist Party, but when Hindus vote across party lines and vote for all parties they are still stigmatised 'communal'. Now, what is all this. Logic seems to have become the monopoly of certain political parties. Beyond whatever reasons they advance remains total darkness. For a moment these 'secularists' should pause to mull over the fact why would 'communal' Hindu not object to having names like Gurubax Singh, Sikandar Saxena, Parvez Sharma, Sohail Guleri etc.? Why would Hindu girls find Muslim boys attractive? Why are there no riots on such marriages? Hindus are tolerant accommodating people. Unless grossly hurt, they take time to take offence.

Coming to this term 'darkness' I think for its definition one will have to go to the Enlightened Christian missions. Since English is their language they should know how to define commonly used terms in English. Although Hindus are a timid community and are known for their sense of withdrawal, Christians are believed to be humble and regard humility a virtue. Somehow the aggressive tone currently adopted by the Church on the occasion of Papal

visit to India cannot be placed in that category. On the eve of 21st century Southern Baptist Church of USA denounces Hindu religion and call Deepavali, a Hindu festival of light, as 'satan' worship days and asked its followers to step up efforts to evangelise them. Even if one argued against Jagatguru Shankaracharya of Puri calling Papal visit to India "an international conspiracy to make India a Christian country", or Shankaracharya of Dwarka calling a demand for Pope's apology "meaningless" without putting an end to "fraudulent conversions". He wants an apology to be voluntary and the missionaries to stop conversions through inducements. The Vatican (*Times of India*, 6 November 1999) expressed its concern for "the obstacles" being placed that hinder the Cathodic Church's evangelisation mission in India and dubbed Hindus 'fundamentalists'.

While 900 million Hindus were being dubbed as lost souls groping in the "hopeless darkness of Hinduism", Indian American community protested against the issue of a booklet by the International Board of the Southern Baptist Convention which contained these remarks. If one thought that Catholic Church in India lagged behind this kind of onslaught against the Hindus, they were proved wrong by a militant Church outfit. (*Times of India,* November 4, 1999

What is most amusing and noteworthy fallout of the controversial Papal visit to India on November 5 and 6 came to light was an edit page exhortation by M.D. Nalapat "Don't Push

the Extremist Agenda". His confusion is remarkable for two reasons. 1) Not many Hindus showed any interest in VHP pronouncements as this Hindu outfit is largely the domain of the few rich and vocal elements of urban India and 2)) even if some one wanted to involve even a fraction of total Hindu society neither VHP nor Bajrang Dal have any substantial following. To imagine that Hindus can be uniformly persuaded to follow any kind of agenda is plainly absurd. What greater proof is needed of Hindus being a largely disparate people when only a few of them are capable of thinking that religion can also be used as an instrument of political warfare. The way BJP had to back out from its original agenda is proof enough that Hindus do not regard religion and politics as one and the same thing and rarely welcome the intrusion of one into another's territory (See *Times of India*, November 3, 1999, "Reformist BJP").

To supplement what is well-known even otherwise, despite all the atrocities Muslims have perpetrated on Hindus down the centuries and what their terrorist organisations are doing today across the nation against them, Hindus as a community bear no rancour against them. BJP ruled States do not witness communal riots. If this is not tolerance, what is it? One feels highly amused at V.S. Naipaul being called "a cheer leader for the BJP" by Salman Rushdie. But how many BJP men have ever read about the location of Trinidad and also many would love to know "who in God's name is Salman Rushdie?" Is he a relation of Salman Khan?

In this context a paper written by Sultan Shahin titled **"Expanding the Empire with Conversion"** (*Times of India*, 8 January 1999) has some relevance. Notwithstanding the fact that Muslims had once applied the same trick to expand territorially but this is now Christians' turn, Shahin says that D'Souza's spirited defence of conversion (*Times of India*, 26 October) was a little misplaced and unnecessary because there are not many Hindus whose psyches are not shattered by the memory of "miseries perpetrated by Muslims and Christian invaders". Few Hindus remain "confident and clear-eyed citizens of India, psyches firmly intact", in the face of Christian missions' onslaught.

He informs the world that M.V. Kamath does not represent the entire Hindu community and the attacks on Christian missionaries are as reprehensible as the one on Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992. He would however like to correct the impression that all missionary-educated Hindus have not continued to remain liberal and uninfluenced by past History. Shahin's advice is "the world would be a much safer, happier place if Christians were to convert themselves to Christianity". What is ignoble about Christianity is not the Religion but "its superstitions and the mafia-like activities of the Vatican".

Despite all the commotion against Papal visit and the demand for apology the Pope did not oblige anyone. In his message he did emphaise the role of Christian mission to evangelise Indians and spread the message of their supreme religion.

I am not quite willing to take sides on this issue but would only add that it is both amusing and extremely distressing to note the venom that Christians have spread and exhibited the rancour they bear against Hindu masses. One never suspected that they would be a fair match to Islamic 'fundamentalists'. With the backing of powerful arms and weaponaries they appear to be quite capable of spreading the message of "love and peace and brotherhood" even as a tiger can to poor hungry lambs.

It is extremely unfortunate that for the first time in Indian social history an issue like this has come to occupy centre stage and now that it cannot be easily wished away it is much better the entire question of "conversion" comes up for review at the national level.

The other matter which demands a serious consideration is the question of "Islamic militancy" in the post-Kargil period. It should be clearly understood that Pakistan is not a country but an ideology — its religion is part of their strategic design to mutilate the Indian nation. The strategy is two-fold. They want to be close to Chinese border and the occupation of Kashmir is part of their hidden agenda. The Kashmiri Muslims should stand wounded that in Pakistani scheme of things they do not count.

Once Kashmir is occupied Ladhak and Himachal would be next targets. The idea is to expand in the Himalayas right up to its tip in

Arunachal, Nagaland and Manipur. Therefore to think that India is huge in every sense of the comparable terms and Pakistan cannot do much harm is untenable both in terms of history and geography. I am quite sure that what I am saying would appear to India's top 'secularists' and their friends in political parties as sheer nonsense. But I regard these 'secularists' a threat to India's security. Anyone who imagines that at any point of time India and Pakistan can live as friendly neighbours is being unrealistic. It is possible to live in peace with China but in their self-interest China cannot afford to be India-friendly. The reasons lie more in region which is on Pakistani border than elsewhere. A few foolishly think and say that America would be of some help to India in this matter. I think India does not figure in any of their scheme of things. Therefore left with Indian secularists India has to fight within — not a civil war on religious grounds but a battle of wits in which one has to argue with a group which is capable of unilinear vision alone. It is incapable of looking beyond the borders of religious discussion. For them there are only two colours — in a multicoloured nature — the black and the white — the black representing Hindus and the white Muslims. One could only pity their colour blindness. Even the results of recent elections have had no impact on their mind or improved their vision.

Hindus and Hinduism have a history of the relationships and experience of Muslim

and Islam. As repeatedly stressed in personal, individual relationship Muslims have been, by and large, polite and very humane and friendly with Hindus but as a religious group they have been extremely rude, intolerant and uncompromising. Similarly, Hindus have individually been very friendly with Muslims but even as a group they have rarely shown courage to stand up to them. Their timidity and cowardice in their reaction to Muslim hostility and religious frenzy is patent. It seems to me that this behaviour has historical antecedents. Even today when India is a free country and its Hindu population could breath freely and take its own decisions — even a simple match of cricket or hockey between India and Pakistan brings out their fear and hostility to the fore. Indian teams rarely show guts or exhibit 'killer instinct' and the result is almost always predictably one-sided. Indian leadership, political parties or all decision-making bodies try to avoid taking hard decisions. When the Government of India did not hesitate to give no special status to Sikkim, why is it so hesitant to repeal Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. Hindus cannot take a decisive action whenever the question of Muslims comes up. Equally patent is this indecisiveness regarding the question of millions of illegal Bangladeshis in India. In fact it is well-known now how and why in the Cachar region of Assam the Bangladeshis outnumber the native population. At first it was election purposes and now for fear of being dubbed 'communal'. Interestingly, the AGP which came to power on this issue alone has

backtracked and betrayed in this regard. The Centre can give a University to this region but the State Government has sulked about connecting a 15 mile stretch of university road with the town of Silchar.

The point at issue is whenever or wherever a decision concerns Muslims it is put in the cold storage. No court order can be executed against Muslims, no state policy is ever possible to be taken and in the face of Muslims the bravest of the brave BJP or Shiv Sena buckles down. The Home Minister of India (a BJP strongman) could not enforce even the issuance of a nationality card to India's population. "Muslim women cannot be photographed" was the plea. Then why declare? The truth is India may have a Government and it may even function politically but its decisions or laws apply only on non-Muslims. In other words how the majority community shall live is not a neutral, secular decision. It is a 'communal' decision. There are numerous provisos to any law that is enacted.

If some more examples are needed one should read what the *Dawn* (Pakistan) wrote editorially on October 11, 1999 on "Madrasas and National Education". It said, "The recent wave of sectarian violence in the country (Pakistan) and the government's strong reaction to it has brought the deeni madaris in to the limelight. The madaris came to acquire extraordinary clout in the 80's when General Ziaul Haq decided to politicize Islam and upgrade religious education in the process. This

policy had its intended impact. With official backing (at times quite overt) and foreign funding (generally covert) the religious schools sprouted all over the educational needs of children from the indigent educational classes. They also provided them food, clothing and shelter, relieving their parents of the burden of taking care of their offspring. Since this phenomenon was a quick one, its magnitude was not generally realised. Hence the feeling of shock when it was disclosed two years ago that there are 5000 madrasas functioning in the country with 500,000 students on their rolls. The problem which came to the fore quite sometime ago is of dual nature. One is that of curriculum. Since the deeni madaris follow their own courses of studies and operate independently of the school system in the country, they cannot be integrated into the educational mainstream unless some structural changes are introduced. The second issue is that of military training some of them are believed to be providing to the students as part of their curriculum".

Let it be known that number of this variety of madaris in India are no less numerically. They are also independent of the state-controlled/ supervised system. Being non-integrated their curriculum also does not teach brotherhood of the Muslim and non-Muslim groups. Their funding is equally foreign. But the question is: does the Government know about it? Do they have statistics for its funding? The communal riots in the South have had their relationship with these madaris but what did the Governments of South India do about it?

The answer to these questions lie in India's 'secular' policies.

The Pakistani Press (*The Frontier Post*, September 18, 2000) acknowledges: "The world now sees Pakistan as a nation that blinks at the activities of free wheeling militant formations. Russia has lately charged Islamabad of sending thousands of Islamists to Chechnya and elsewhere. The Chinese too have been wary of such developments...." The question is how many Indian papers discuss these issues freely?

Instead of discussing openly why Pandits of Kashmir were displaced ten years ago and why should Assam be next on the list the *Times of India* (6 December, 1999) is pleased to carry a story "BJP mothballs Ram temple plan" as though they were ever really serious about the plan, in the first place.

The endless debate on 'secularism' versus 'communalism' is a political trick aimed to hoodwink the people to remain in power. The 'secularism' of Nehru-Gandhi parivar or India's left is in no way better than the 'communalism' of the BJP. These are slogans for the gullible masses to give them power to further their own interests. Hindus and Hinduism are victims of the machinations of these leaders whose commitment to chair of power overrides national interests. In this game of one upmanship the media and intellectuals of India are encashing their (sham) commitments. In the name of one or the other slogan they have their share of power and lucre. The nation per se does not figure in their scheme of things. What a shame

that India cannot give even a permanent visa to Tasleema Nasreen.

In this context one must remember that while we discuss 'conversion' as a national issue the contribution of Christian missionaries to discovering India's glorious past and its careful reconstruction should not be overlooked. Similarly, we must not show our ingratitude to acknowledge the Sufi stream of Islam which gave Indians a whole string of saint poets and true religious consciousness. Various other fallouts of both contacts need to be preserved as part of our history. "Hate the sin and not the sinners", said Gandhiji. Oppose where it is necessary. Show gratitude as part of human grace.

The last point conceives the religious aspect of Hinduism. While Hindus are basically monotheistic and all its scriptures emphaise the transitory nature of all beings and even of Sun and Moon and the galaxies, it so happens the practise of rituals appears to others very confusing. But then on either ground whether of monotheism or polytheism no one can claim superiority. Since Hindus do not proselytize the onslaught is one sided. Having remained out of power for countless centuries their ignorance and poverty is indescribably appalling. This alone cannot be the ground for public ridicule.

I conclude my write-up with a quote from Rigveda:

ON CREATION

(Nasdiya Sukta, Rigveda — 10/129/i-v)

What was the state of Creation like during its complete destruction (Pralaya)? Who is the Creator? What was the Principal Cause of Creation and What served as its Principal Instrument? During Pralaya (total annihilation) there was no Evil nor Good and neither did atoms fill the horizon (Space). What was shrouded and by what? Who was the Protector? Did only the deep seas exist?

There was no Death nor was there any Life. Even the Day and Night had not taken birth. The lone Creator breathed without any life-breath by his own will. Nothing superior existed beyond Him.

In that Dark existed the unmanifested Nature like seamless water. Everything looked small before Him. Nature started gradually maifesting itself because of the Tap (deep meditation) of the Ultimate Being.

What exxisted in the form of inner self (man) during Pralaya got superimposed by a Desire. The seers could thus realise that Good was latent in the Evil (even as light is in the dark). The creation could arise out of the unmanifested Nature. Slanted bright rays spread out of these three — God, Soul and the Nature. What was below was as amazing as the one's who could serve as recepticles for that amazing semen above.

The truth is who knows the Reality and what could one say? How did the Creation take birth and how did the variety in it take shape? The gods, the sun and moon all followed that

creation, therefore who knows how the Creation did take place?

The one who created this Universe is its sustainer. One who presides over it is the Creator Himself. If anyone knows the Reality, only He does.

Before Creation manifested itself the Supreme Being known as the 'Hiranyagarbha' alone was there. Nature too was in His womb. Nature manifested itself because of Divine Consciousness both in its living and the non-living forms. That Supreme Being alone is the sole Protector and the God almighty in the entire gamut of Creation. He alone carries within Himself the stellar systems. We must surrender ourselves before that Almighty.

Tamam Shud!